

THE JACKSONIAN MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

June, 1961

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to trace the varied interpretations of the nature and significance of the Jacksonian movement as they have developed from Jackson's day to our own. The author has conceived his first responsibility to be the faithful reproduction of the interpretative ideas regarding the Jacksonian movement and its place in American history which have been advanced through the years. His primary purpose is to trace their evolution, not to pass judgment on their validity. In this historiographic essay no effort will be made to suggest a final, "definitive" interpretation of the Jacksonian era.

The first two chapters of this study are devoted to the partisan debates of the Jackson era. In dealing with the contemporary partisan interpretations of the party battles of the Jackson era, this writer has endeavored to present the themes embodied in the political polemics of the day as he found them. Though some measure of interpretation is implicit and inevitable in the very act of the selection of materials, as well as in the manner of their presentation, it has not been the author's intention to advance his own interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. Rather, he has sought to answer the question, How did the partisans of Jackson's day defend their party programs? How did they explain their relationship to the main stream of American history? However, because the supporters of Jackson and the adherents

of Whiggery were both beset by dissension within their own ranks, it has been necessary to delineate the factional cleavages within both parties in order to give meaning to the diverse and contradictory arguments employed by both sides.

In portraying these partisan interpretations, the author has drawn heavily on the standard sources of the period: newspapers, magazines, political broadsides and pamphlets, legislative proceedings, private correspondence, diaries, memoirs and campaign biographies.

This portrayal of the partisan arguments of Jackson's day has been necessary, because, as the author found early in the course of his investigations, many of the major interpretations of the meaning and significance of the Jacksonian political struggles were first advanced, in highly incomplete and greatly exaggerated form, by the historical actors themselves and may be found in the sources of the period. To understand the later historiography of the Jacksonian epoch, an understanding of these themes is imperative.

The major portion of the study is devoted to interpretations of the Jackson era advanced by professional historians of later generations. In tracing the course of the varying interpretations of the Jacksonian movement, the author has endeavored to answer the question, Why does one interpretative theme appeal to one generation and leave another uninterested and unimpressed? Why do historians of one period regard certain partisan fulminations with great seriousness, while those of the next may dismiss the same statements as empty cant? In making his inquiry, he has turned to an examination of the changing political and intellectual climate of opinion and has endeavored to judge its impact on historical thought. Though restricted to the historiography

of the Jacksonian era, this study is directed to the investigation of the problem of historical relativism. An attempt has been made to determine whether and to what extent the historian's sensitivity to current philosophical trends and contemporary political issues influence his decision to accept certain interpretative themes and reject others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to his committee for their advice and assistance in the preparation of this study. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Arthur W. Thompson for his sympathetic and painstaking supervision of this undertaking. The writer is also deeply indebted to Dr. Clifton K. Yearley for his valuable criticisms of the first draft of the manuscript, to Dr. William G. Carleton and Dr. Franklin A. Doty for their perceptive remarks on the problems of the Jacksonian era, and to Dr. Donald Worcester for much needed friendly encouragement and moral support.

The writer wishes to thank the staff of the University of Florida Library for their invaluable assistance in obtaining through inter-library loan many of the materials used in the preparation of this study.

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CHAPTER I

PARTISAN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE JACKSONIAN

MOVEMENT: THE JACKSONIANS

Noting the widespread jubilation which greeted Andrew Jackson's inauguration in 1829, Daniel Webster remarked caustically: "The people seem to think that the country has been rescued from some great danger." To faithful readers of the Jacksonian press, such a conviction may well have seemed rather plausible. Throughout the campaign, Jacksonian politicians and publicists had decried the alleged existence of an "aristocratic conspiracy" to undermine Republican government in America.

The question involved in this presidential election [proclaimed Duff Green's United States Telegraph] is not who shall be our rulers . . . but whether this government shall be a Republic, or degenerate into a monarchy. . . .

Intoning again and again the ominous phrase "Corrupt Bargain" the cohorts of Old Hickory lambasted their opponents for their "contempt" for the popular will and "hatred of republican principles." To the Jacksonian faithful, the refusal of Congress, dominated by the partisans of Adams and Clay, to select General Jackson, the candidate receiving the largest popular vote, as President in the contested election of 1824-25, provided cardinal proof of the truth of these dire allegations.¹

¹George Ticknor Curtis, The Life of Daniel Webster (New York, 1870), I, 340; United States Telegraph, October 17, 28, 1827, March 1 (extra), May 10 (extra), September 18, October 17, 26, 1828; National Journal, February 1, 1825, December 29, 1827, April 15, 17, 1828;

Embellishing this theme, the Jacksonian press had warned its readers that John Quincy Adams, "an aristocrat" in spirit and an American "only by accident of birth," conspired to the "perpetuation of his power." His success, it was charged, would result in "degrading the dignity of the office and corrupting the morals of the community." It was further asserted that Adams had used the influence of the presidential office to recruit the press in support of his unholy determination to "put down Liberty and raise in its place Aristocracy." Dwelling on this topic, the Telegraph pointedly reminded its readers of Adams' Federalist antecedents.

The contest, then [Green declared] is now as in 1793 and 1800 between the people on one side and the power and patronage of the government on the other. The press is the fountain whence the people drink the living water of political truth. The administration of the elder Adams attempted to dry up the fountain by sedition laws, that of the younger attempts to poison it by bribery. The reign of the one was the reign of terror, that of the other is a reign of corruption.

Crying of "executive despotism" Jacksonian propagandists warned of the "coming of monarchy" and prophesied the end of the Republic, should their cause fail to be sustained by an aroused populace.²

In its militant efforts to expose "infidelity" to the national heritage, the Jacksonian press ruthlessly scrutinized every aspect of Adams' private life. Indignant editorials deplored the President's "contemptuous disdain" for "true Republican simplicity." Throughout his career, it was declared, Adams "manifested an over-weening desire to introduce anti-Republican and aristocratic fashions at the seat of government." Some concluded that "his foreign education and long

Washington Gazette, February 23, 1825.

²United States Telegraph, October 27, 1827 (extra), February 8, 1828.

residence abroad have rendered him incompetent justly to appreciate and regard the sterling but unadorned features of the American character." Other journals, no doubt hoping to horrify both the pious and the thrifty, reported that Adams, a profligate and an infidel, had furnished the White House with a billiard table, at government expense! It was also claimed that the wicked New England aristocrat "was wont" to violate the Sabbath by riding "like mad" through the countryside, clad in the finery of a British country squire. An obscene story which charged that Adams, as American Minister to the court of the Czar of all the Russians, had brutally subjected a virtuous American girl to the foul desires of that tyrant also gained wide circulation. And, as crowning proof of Adams' animosity to the "principles of true Republicanism," some highly scurrilous verses ridiculing Thomas Jefferson and lampooning Democracy which the President had written in his youth were reprinted in Jacksonian papers throughout the land. To faithful readers of the Jacksonian press, there could be little doubt that "King John II" and his wicked followers despised in their hearts the People and plotted the betrayal of the cause of popular government.³

Out of the political propaganda of 1828 emerged the earliest interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. To those who accepted this Jacksonian appeal, the movement's great objective was one of austere simplicity: the preservation and restoration of Republican ideals.

³National Journal, April 24, 1827; Albany Argus, June 10, 1828; National Intelligencer, October 27, 1827; The Proceedings and Addresses of the New Hampshire State Republican Convention (Concord, 1828); New Hampshire Patriot, February 4, March 10, May 12, June 2, September 29, 1828; Richmond Enquirer (semi-weekly edition), September 23, October 7, 10, 1828; John Quincy Adams, Memoirs (Philadelphia, 1877), VII, pp. 281, 396, 415, 423, 460, 470, 471; D. C. Ker to Andrew Jackson, November 12, 1828, Jackson MSS (microfilmed by the Library of Congress).

Corruption, venality, and hostility to popular rule were once again abroad in the land. The Temple of Republican Virtue stood profaned. The most sacred precepts of the Republic had been betrayed by faithless servants. And once again, the Old Hero, the Victor of New Orleans, like Cincinnatus, had responded to the summons to leave his plow and save the nation. In this view, Andrew Jackson had come to the presidency pledged to crush the political power of the "aristocracy" and assure the final triumph of the rule of the people. To many, the Jacksonian appeal was most plausible. As they reflected upon the sordid tale of the "corrupt bargain," Jacksonian partisans nodded in grim approval when told that in Old Hickory's electoral victory "the people triumphed over aristocracy." Colonel William B. Lewis, intimate adviser of the President-elect, captured their mood when he wrote to a political ally some weeks following Jackson's election of "the triumph of virtue and republican simplicity over corruption and unprincipled aristocracy." A Western newspaper man put it differently. The Inaugural, wrote Amos Kendall, was "a proud day for the people. General Jackson is their own president."⁴

In the years which followed Jackson's elevation to the presidency, other issues came to replace the "corrupt bargain" as the focal point of Jacksonian political protest. The basic Jacksonian definition of their historical role as defenders of the Republic from its enemies however, remained essentially unchanged. To warn of "aristocratic and dangerous principles" harbored by the opposition and to speak darkly of a "conspiracy" to subvert republican government

⁴Col. William B. Lewis to James A. Hamilton, November 12, 1828, Van Buren MSS. (microfilmed by the Library of Congress); Argus of Western America, March 18, 1829.

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became almost a standard formula for Jacksonian publicists. Thus, staunch Jacksonian editors perceived in proposals to build local roads at federal expense a plot to "destroy our free institutions by divesting the states of their reserved rights, and by rendering the central government unlimited, and eventually, monarchical." Opposition suggestions regarding the tariff were discovered to be somehow connected to "a gigantic scheme of injustice and oppression" conceived for the "total overthrow of the liberties of the American people." Nicholas Biddle's Bank of the United States, bete noir to the true friend of Jackson, was freely characterized as a "Hydra of Corruption" intent upon the "subversion of our heaven protected institutions" and "the reduction of all citizens of the Republic to lowly vassals of a monied aristocracy."

The more extreme Jacksonian partisans even argued that all who criticized old Hickory's administration were motivated solely by the desire "to destroy the rights, happiness and liberty of this favored country, and reduce the American people to the same abject condition as millions of the oppressed and enslaved of the old continent." To those who shared this conviction, the historical mission of the Jackson movement was the salvation of the Republic from the conspiracies of its enemies.

To deem ANDREW JACKSON [resolved the Democratic Republicans of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania in 1831] the providential instrument in the hands of the people to check the destructive march of corruption, misrule, and anti-Republican tendencies, the wicked intrigues, onerous plots and hypocritical machinations of the hereditary enemies of the free principles of the Constitution and the equal rights of men.

Wherever the Jacksonian faithful congregated, this analysis of the political battles of the day proved most attractive. Professed belief in

the existence of the "aristocratic conspiracy" is perhaps the most persistent theme of Jacksonian political literature. Again and again, Jacksonians called upon their fellow countrymen "to preserve the Republic against the ambitions of interested partisans who would sacrifice that freedom which is the rich inheritance of our forefathers to gratify a sordid and avaricious desire for power."⁵

American political partisans have long been accustomed to viewing with alarm and pointing with pride. It is difficult to judge how much of this was mere political bombast, expressed in the exaggerated idiom of the time, believed in full by no one, and how much reflected very real convictions and anxieties. It is reasonable to assume that many took this sort of ritualistic vituperation with a grain of salt.

Yet the profound apprehensions expressed in early Jacksonian electioneering propaganda cannot be totally dismissed as empty demagoguery. Though often stated in extreme hyperbole the Jacksonian message reflected certain widely held philosophical assumptions. To many who flocked to the Jacksonian standard, the Jackson movement was a continuation of the Jeffersonian struggle against the dangers of a centralized government controlled by a privileged aristocracy. Though Jacksonian partisans were by no means consistent or unified in their adherence to the Jeffersonian creed--not a few Jacksonians of 1828 had formerly been of Federalist persuasion--probably a majority saw in Old Hickory the heir to the mantle of the Sage of Monticello.

⁵Louisville Advertiser, quoted in The Globe, May 14, 1831; New York Evening Post, August 19, 1834, November 1, 1832, October 5, 12, 1832; Boston Statesman, quoted in The Globe, March 29, 1831; National Intelligencer, July 25, 1830; The Republican Farmer, quoted in The Globe, April 16, 1831.

The heritage of the American revolution, with its bitter memories of the "tyranny" of George III, reinforced by recollections of the Federalist period, with its Alien and Sedition Acts, had left in the American mind a deep-seated fear of governmental authority and federal power. That human liberty and centralized power were forever incompatible had attained, for many, the status of an unquestionable truth.

Events of the administration of John Quincy Adams revived old animosities and stirred latent suspicions. To strict Jeffersonians, Adams' loose constructionist view of the Constitution and his ambitious proposals for the use of federal power to further internal improvements and encourage domestic industry appeared profoundly subversive of true constitutional liberty. Furthermore, Adams' blunt pronouncement in his Inaugural address that federal officers "must not be palsied by the will of their constituents" seemed to forbode a most oppressive assertion of the supremacy of authority over the will of the governed. Solemnly men of the old school agreed that constitutional liberty could not survive, were such heresies to receive the sanction of law. Appealing to the past experiences of the nation, as they conceived them, many Jackson partisans cried with Martin Van Buren in 1828: "A deliberate plan has been formed by men in power . . . to change the government from its true Republican form."⁶

In their conception of the role of political parties in

⁶William H. Holland, The Life and Political Opinions of Martin Van Buren (Hartford, 1836), pp. 289-290; Martin Van Buren, An Inquiry Into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States (New York, 1867); James D. Richardson (ed.), Messages and Papers of the Presidents (Washington, D. C., 1896), III, 311-317.

American life, the Jacksonians followed Thomas Jefferson in arguing that parties in America reflected the cleavage in society between "aristocracy" and "democracy." One party, according to this analysis, reflected the people's true interests and expressed the popular will. Its great objective was the maximization of liberty, an objective attained by rigorously resisting the encroachments of centralized government. The other party, reflecting the selfish vested interests of an "aristocratic minority," sought to circumscribe freedom and exploit the majority by indiscriminately extending federal power. In the erection of an "omnipotent centralized government" this faction conspired to the ultimate destruction of states rights and the extinction of freedom. To oppose its designs constituted the great historical mission of the party of true republicanism. Even a cursory reading of contemporary journals discloses the prevalence of this analysis of the party battles of the era in Jacksonian circles.⁷

Drawing upon this theory of politics, Martin Van Buren declared before the Senate on the eve of Jackson's election in 1828: "All human experience justifies the deep and settled distrust of the people and of the states" of measures which enhance the power and authority of the federal government. Van Buren charged the partisans of Adams and Clay

⁷Thomas Jefferson, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York, 1904), VIII, 276-277, IX, 306-307, XIII, 279-280, XIV, 422, XVI, 72-74; New York Sentinel, March 22, 1830; The Republican Farmer, quoted in The Globe, July 26, 1831; Louisville Advertiser, quoted in The Globe, May 14, 1831; New York Evening Post, September 5, October 5, 12, 1832; August 19, 1834; "Resolution of the Barnstable County, Massachusetts Democratic Republicans," The Globe, March 29, 1831; "Resolution of the Luzerne County, Pennsylvania Democratic Republicans," ibid., April 16, 1831; "Address of the Republican State Convention Assembled at Herkimer to the Democracy of New York," ibid., April 2, 1832; American Manufacturer, quoted in The Globe, May 14, 1831; The Globe, August 3, September 12, 1831.

with "seeking to absorb all power from its legitimate sources" in the hope of "drawing everything that can be drawn into the vortex of federal power." The success of their schemes, he prophesied, would result in the triumph of the "monarchical" principle of government and in the total destruction of liberty. Van Buren exhorted his listeners to remain true to the principle of "true democracy." That principle, he argued, rested

on the assumption that the disposition of man to abuse delegated authority is inherent and incorrigible; it therefore seeks its only security in the limitation and distribution of those trusts which the very existence of government require to be reposed somewhere. Hence the aversion of its supporters to grant more power than is indisputably necessary for the objects of society and their desire that it be conferred in as many hands as is consistent with efficiency.

It was Van Buren's conclusion that the "true disciples of the democratic theory of government," realizing centralization of power ultimately must subvert true liberty, always regarded with alarm extensions of federal activity.⁸

Though there were no doubt many in the Jacksonian camp in 1828 who could not fully accept this view of government, belief in the evils of extensive governmental activity and in the virtues of states rights soon became a cardinal tenet in the Jacksonian creed. Though local political considerations not infrequently led to inconsistency of action on this score, verbal allegiance to these principles soon became the hallmark of Jacksonian orthodoxy. The masthead of the official Jackson organ proclaimed boldly, "The world is too much governed," while the Democratic Review, a fervidly pro-Jacksonian magazine, taking its cue from Jefferson, affirmed "that government is best which governs

⁸Holland, pp. 289-290.

least!"

Portraying themselves as "the providential guardians of constitutional purity," the Jacksonians called for a restoration of strict construction of the nation's basic document. Old Hickory, seeking to justify his course to a hostile Senate in 1834, appealed to the judgment of history, declaring that it was his mission "to heal the wounds of the Constitution and preserve it from further violation." He justified his insistence upon strict adherence to the letter of the Constitution on Jeffersonian grounds, warning Congress that departure from constitutional orthodoxy could but lead to the "prostitution of our government to advancement of the few at the expense of the many."⁹

In justification of their belief in limited government, Jacksonian spokesmen frequently argued that extensive governmental activities could never benefit the majority, but would always be perverted to serve the selfish interests of a self-appointed aristocracy. John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the Democratic Review, explained his conviction as follows:

Understood as a central consolidating power, managing and directing the various general interests of society, all government is evil and the parent of evil. . . . The best government is that which governs least. No human depositories can, with safety, be trusted with the power of legislation upon the general interests of society so as to operate directly on the industry and property of the community. Such power must be perpetually liable to the most pernicious abuse, from the natural imperfection, both in the wisdom of judgment and purity of purpose, of all human legislation, exposed constantly to the pressure of partial interests--interests which, at the same time they are essentially selfish and tyrannical, are ever vigilant, persevering and subtle in all the arts of deception and corruption. In fact, the whole history of human society may be appealed to, in evidence that the abuse of power a thousandfold more than

⁹Richardson, II, 92; Niles Register, July 14, 1832.

overbalances its beneficial use. Legislation has been the parent of nine-tenths of all the evil, moral and physical, by which mankind has been afflicted since the creation of the world, and by which human nature has been self-degraded, fettered and oppressed.

Jacksonian theory thus postulated a dualism between limited, decentralized government, which guaranteed to all the maximum of human liberty, and centralized federal power, which, in the eternal scheme of things, would inevitably be used by the privileged few to oppress the defenseless majority. The implications of this conception were inescapable. "The man who chiefly desires to preserve the rights of the states, and he whose interests are chiefly concentrated in perpetuating the rule of the many," the Democratic Review editorialized, "must, under our political system use the same means to attain their ends."¹⁰

The deliverance of the nation from the dangers of centralized government and aristocratic despotism became a standard theme for Jacksonian political publicists. One journal rejoiced that, in 1828, the people "rising in their strength . . . snatched the government from the impure hands of profligate rulers who were hurrying us onward to the grief of consolidation and despotism, and brought back the declining Republic to the lofty and safe position in which it was placed by the framers of our sacred Constitution." A gathering of the faithful in New York in 1832 rejoiced that Old Hickory had proven "sensible to the danger which threatened the purity and ultimate existence of our free institutions in the increased encroachments upon the reserved rights of the states which had characterized the preceding administration." Senator Silas Wright of New York, expanding upon this topic, informed

¹⁰United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 1-15; XV (August, 1844), 232.

the Senate, in 1834, that Andrew Jackson was "under Providence . . . destined yet to accomplish what neither Thomas Jefferson nor his successor could accomplish . . . the restoration of the Constitution of his country."¹¹

Charles Jared Ingersoll of Philadelphia, in a Fourth of July oration in 1835 struck the same theme when he rejoiced in "the radical work" of Jackson's "reforming presidency, which has taken away most of the modifications engrafted upon the system of Jefferson and restored the Constitution to its primitive standard." After speculating upon the dire consequences of "consolidation," a campaign biographer of Martin Van Buren assured his readers that "the commanding intellect of General Jackson saw the alarming danger, his more than Roman firmness encountered it; the Constitution was rescued and the country saved." He urged the electorate to assure the continued safety of the nation by electing Van Buren Jackson's successor.¹²

The Jacksonians were also quick to condemn constitutional heresies which might place the Republic in renewed peril. To perceive in opposition proposals plots for the subversion of the Constitution, the destruction of the rights of the states and the enslavement of the people became almost an automatic Jacksonian reflex. To those who argued that the obligation of Congress to provide for the general welfare justified a loose interpretation of the constitutional powers of the federal government, the Globe, speaking for orthodox Jacksonians,

¹¹Eastern Argus, quoted in The Globe, May 18, 1831; New York Evening Post, October 3, November 5, 1832; R. H. Cillet, The Life and Times of Silas Wright (Auburn, 1874), I, 184-185.

¹²The Pennsylvanian, July 29, 1839; Holland, pp. 283-284.

replied:

Necessity is the plea with which the aristocracy would supersede the Constitution and make the government the creature of their will. . . . The doctrine of the right of Congress to do whatever it may deem 'necessary' for the 'general welfare' leaves us nothing but the forms of a republican government. It is no longer a government of the people controlling their agents through a written charter. The agents on this principle supersede the authority under which they act, and become masters.¹³

To some Jacksonians, fear of the evils of government was restricted to opposition to federal encroachments. Though quite willing to condemn federal activities, these followers of Old Hickory were most eager to secure the enactment of certain state legislation incorporating banks, building roads or subsidizing industry, particularly when they stood to profit from such measures. There were others, however, who made no such fine distinction. To the more doctrinaire Jacksonians, the tendency of individuals to look to government, at any level, for aid and assistance in the solution of their economic problems, was most deplorable. Petitions for tariff protection, for government financed internal improvements, and for special charters of incorporations, were all suspect to these economic individualists.

William Leggett, New York newspaper editor, expressed the conviction of this faction of the Jacksonian party when he warned that deviation from the principles of strict laissez faire would soon "reduce men from a dependence upon their own exertions to a dependence upon the caprices of government." Freedom and paternalism, Leggett declared, were forever incompatible. "A government may at pleasure elevate one class and depress another; it may one day legislate exclusively for the farmer, the next for the mechanic, and the third

¹³The Globe, June 11, 1831.

for the manufacturer, who all thus become the mere puppets of legislative cobbling and tinkering, instead of independent citizens relying on their own resources for prosperity." Any government which intervened in the affairs of the marketplace, said Leggett, "may be called a government of equal rights, but it is in nature and essence a disguised despotism. It is a capricious dispenser of good and evil, without any restraint except its own sovereign will. It holds in its hands the distribution of the goods of the world and is consequently the uncontrolled master of the people."¹⁴

Appealing to history, Leggett endeavored to refute the notion that government could be used to protect the interests of the poorer classes of society. "Experience will show that its power has always been used under the influence and for the exclusive benefit of wealth." Leggett concluded that the poor would find that "their only safeguard against oppression is a system of legislation which leaves all to the free exercise of their talents and industry within the limits of general law and which on no pretense of public good, bestows on any particular class or industry or body of men rights or privileges not equally enjoyed by the great aggregate of the body politic." That government interference in economic matters could lead to any other end he could not conceive. In that, he spoke for most of the intellectual theorists within the Jacksonian ranks.¹⁵

Leggett's laissez faire philosophy, which drew heavily on Adam

¹⁴New York Evening Post, November 21, 1834. For further examples of Leggett's argument, see William Leggett, The Political Writings of William Leggett, ed. Theodore Sedgwick, Jr. (2 vols., New York, 1840).

¹⁵New York Evening Post, November 21, 1834.

Smith, David Ricardo and the Manchester economists, was at first dismissed as a dangerous nonsense by the powers in control of Jacksonian politics in his native state of New York. Yet Leggett's viewpoint came to be Jacksonian orthodoxy before the end of the decade. Though there were some within the Jackson camp who never embraced this viewpoint save in gesture, Jacksonian publicists freely equated Jacksonian Democracy with economic individualism. Indeed, Old Hickory himself had long maintained that government should "confine itself to equal protection" and avoid legislative action designed to foster the interests of any one group at the expense of any others. His successor, Martin Van Buren, invoked the laissez faire philosophy when, at the height of the Panic of 1837, he complained that "people expect too much from government" and declared that individuals must not look to Washington for salvation from the consequences of their economic follies. Toward the end of the Jackson era, an impassioned young Democratic journalist named Walt Whitman summarized the Jacksonian philosophy when he wrote: "Men must be masters unto themselves and not look to presidents and legislative bodies for aid. . . . it is only the novice in political economy who thinks it the duty of the government to make its citizens happy . . . although government can do little positive good to the people, it may do an immense deal of harm. And here is where the beauty of the Democratic principle comes in. Democracy would prevent all this harm."¹⁶

¹⁶Workingman's Advocate, April 9, 1831; New York Evening Post, November 11, 1831; Banner of the Constitution, quoted in The Globe, March 19, 1831; Edward L. Shepard, Martin Van Buren (Boston, 1899), p. 232; Brooklyn Eagle, June 26, 1847, quoted in Joseph Blau (ed.), Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1954), p. 131.

Believing government centralization the invariable prelude to the establishment of a privileged aristocracy bent upon the destruction of popular rule and the ruthless exploitation of the people, Jacksonian publicists sought to identify their cause with that of all defenders of freedom, claiming an historical kinship with the Patriots of the Revolution and the founders of the Democratic-Republican party. They sought also to stigmatize their opponents as the heirs of Toryism and Federalism. Efforts were made to identify opposition leaders with Hamiltonian distrust of popular rule, Federalist suppression of civil liberties and even Tory disloyalty to the American revolution. Jacksonian papers charged that the National Republican, and later, the Whig parties were but renascent Federalism, composed exclusively of discredited "aristocrats" who hypocritically claimed allegiance to the glorious traditions of revolutionary Whiggery and Jeffersonian Democracy while plotting the subversion of the Republic. Invoking the spectre of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Hartford Convention and "Blue Light" Federalism, the Jacksonians decried the dangers of entrusting government to such inveterate enemies of Republican Virtue.

Echoing this theme, an anonymous letter from an obscure Jackson follower, published in the Globe in the summer of 1831, charged that the party opposing Old Hickory and the Democracy was motivated by the same spirit and composed of the same elements as that "party which concerted the separation of New England from the Confederacy, in the last war cleaving to Britain for protection." Their disloyalty to the nation was further proven by their kinship with those who earlier had proposed "government with a President for life, a Congress for life, with hereditary branches of primogeniture, and a judiciary for life, all

irresponsible to the people." Their aim was no less than the destruction of the heroic work of the revolution, for they hoped "to recolonize the states as formerly they were, into a consolidated government." A New England Jacksonian editor warned that Whigs were of the same ilk as those who, in earlier years, had "ushered into existence the sedition law, abridged freedom of speech and the press, and sought to bring out a standing army to overawe the people." Silas Wright, speaking before the Senate in 1834, charged that the opponents of Jackson's bank policy were motivated by the same contempt for the people which the tyrant George III had harbored for the colonists and which had driven the patriots into just rebellion against his tyranny. A Democratic campaign pamphlet in 1840 found in the ranks of the opposition men who had given "THREE CHEERS" when told, in 1814, of the burning of the capitol by the British invaders.¹⁷

That the followers of Adams and Clay denied these allegations and would not confess their sins did not for one moment deceive the true Democrat. A Jacksonian editor, warning of their "hypocritical treachery," found their behavior quite similar to the contemporary, Jesuit dominated ultra party in France, which advised its followers to cloak the nature of their conspiracy against the constitutional

¹⁷The Globe, January 19, June 15, 1831; The Vermont Gazette, quoted in The Globe, August 31, 1831; Boston Statesman, quoted in New York Evening Post, October 5, 1832; "Resolution of the Barnstable County, Massachusetts Democratic Republicans," quoted in The Globe, March 29, 1831; "Resolution of the Democratic Republican Young Men of the Ninth Ward," quoted in New York Evening Post, October 12, 1832; "Resolution of the Democratic Republican Young Men of the Eleventh Ward," quoted in the New York Evening Post, October 5, 1832; G. G. Greene and B. H. Hallett, "The Identity of the Old Hartford Convention Federalists With the Modern Whig Harrison Party Carefully Illustrated by Living Specimens," Boston Morning Post, extra of August, 1840; Gillet, I, 188-189.

government by freely espousing "Republican ideas." "How closely the art of the banished despots resembles the contemptible craft of the federal party in America, who have stolen the name of Republicanism in order to make war in disguise upon its principles," concluded the editor. "Messrs. Adams and Clay have, perhaps, through fellow feeling transmitted to Charles X their plan of opposition. At any rate the resemblance between the tactics of the ex-King and his ex-Ministers cannot fail to strike the most careless observer." The Jacksonians, in the manner of most American political partisans before and since thus endeavored to interpret the party battles of their age as the struggle of good and evil, of the forces of righteousness, committed to liberty and the defense of popular rule, with the powers of darkness, secretly devoted to aristocracy, repression and the destruction of popular rights.¹⁸

The Jacksonian crusade for the "reform of government" and the "restoration of constitutional purity and republican simplicity" culminated in a series of electoral triumphs which made the Democratic party of Jackson and Van Buren the majority party throughout the 1830's and during most of the 1840's and 1850's. In their administration of government and in their advocacy of specific programs, the Jacksonians again and again stressed that they were but serving as the "obedient instruments of the popular will." In developing this theme, the Jacksonians came to enunciate that dualism which is the very touchstone of the Jacksonian conception of democracy: the virtue and wisdom of the common people of the nation, as opposed to the selfishness and the

¹⁸ Eastern Argus, quoted in The Globe, May 7, 1831; The Globe, August 31, 1831, November 26, 1831, November 5, 1832; Baltimore Republican, quoted in The Globe, May 18, 1831.

depravity of self-appointed elites. The Jacksonians were uncompromising believers in majority rule. To them the "Reign of King Numbers" held no terror.

In justifying their majoritarian philosophy, the Jacksonians employed two somewhat contradictory arguments. On the one hand, they affirmed that the people, being essentially noble and free of the corruptions of special privilege and the vices of aristocracy, would always rule with wisdom and justice. On the other, they appealed to belief in human corruptibility--to original sin, if you will--to assert that, man being an essentially selfish animal, only rule by the majority could protect the great masses of people from oppression and exploitation. The majority alone, it was argued, could have no possible reason to betray the majority interests. The Washington Globe invoked both arguments when it declared that only the "homely intelligence" of the common people had preserved:

this country from becoming the prey of insidious political leaders and the minions and partisans who rely upon their success, for the power of committing spoliation upon the people, in the name of government. These selfish politicians and partisans, with their opportunities to obtain information, are least able to judge rightly. They see everything with an eye to their own designs and decide upon it, as applicable to their own interests. Men who live by the labor of their hands--who do not follow politics as a profession, to minister to their ambition or avarice--these are the men who have an interest which cannot be separated from the welfare of the country and whose selfishness cannot be distinguished from patriotism.

But the justification for rule by majority judgment was not based on the concept of enlightened self-interest alone; the Globe proceeded to speak of the innate virtue and goodness of the common people of the land. That the average citizen was often without formal education was deemed of no importance; indeed, it was regarded almost as a source of

virtue, for "in employing their intellects upon every subject, high and low, frankly or boldly, without the aid of a bookworm or the discipline of a pedagogue" the common people, unencumbered by pretense and free from the "aristocratic snobbery" of the formally educated, could perceive with true clarity "the beauties of Republican simplicity" and act with true nobility.¹⁹

Celebration of the intuitive wisdom of the people became a favorite pastime for Jacksonian publicists, who not infrequently lamented the "corrupting influence" of formal education. Martin Van Buren's campaign biographer in 1835 rejoiced that his candidate had received little schooling, fearing that "from the eloquent pages of Livy, or the honeyed eulogiums of Horace, he might have been inspired with an admiration for regal pomp and aristocratic dignity uncongenial to the nature and independence of his mind." Some years earlier, a group of supporters of Old Hickory in New York had taken pride in the fact that their hero "lacked the distinction of the academy" for they could therefore claim for him "those higher attributes which an active life alone can teach, and which can never be acquired in the halls of a university--a knowledge of mankind." These New York Jacksonians concluded by declaring: "We claim for Andrew Jackson, above all other qualities, an integrity never known to yield to interest or ambition, and a judgment unclouded by the visionary speculations of the academician."²⁰

¹⁹The Globe, April 2, June 5, August 15, 1831; United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 26; Baltimore Republican, quoted in The Globe, October 21, 1831; New York Sentinel, February 18, 1830.

²⁰Ballard, p. 17ff; Jacksonian Republican, October 4, 15, 1828.

If Thomas Jefferson honored the scholar and the philosopher and rejoiced in the "aristocracy of the intellect," his Jacksonian political heirs rejected every conceivable form of "aristocracy" and stressed the "homely virtues" of the untrained, intuitive mind. Stubbornly practical and dogmatically egalitarian, Jackson's followers affirmed their faith in the innate wisdom and enlightened self-interest of the great majority. Their rejection of elitism was unqualified. "Any citizen," they maintained, "is quite capable of understanding the affairs of our government."²¹

One intellectual in their midst endeavored to work out a metaphysical justification for the Jacksonian faith in majoritarian democracy. George Bancroft, employing those premises of transcendentalism which he had freely imbibed during his student days in Germany, explained: "There is a spirit in man, not in a privileged few, not in those of us only who by the favor of Providence have been nursed in the public schools. It is in man; it is the attribute of the race. The spirit, which is the guide to truth, is the gracious gift to every member of the human family." To be sure, that spirit was not possessed in equal measure by everyone--some were closer to the spirit than others. But nonetheless, all men shared its insights. From this, Bancroft reasoned that the collective will of the majority must therefore reflect the highest truth attainable, for "the people collectively are wiser than the most gifted individual, for all his wisdom constitutes but a part of theirs." It followed that majoritarian democracy was therefore divinely sanctioned, for "the decrees of the universal conscience are the nearest approach to God in the soul of man." Human

²¹New York Evening Journal, quoted in The Globe, April 2, 1831.

progress and the progressive betterment and ennoblement of the race would therefore result from the sovereignty of the people. If some Jacksonians pointed to the corruptibility of human nature as the primary justification of majority rule, Bancroft's democratic creed reflected a happier belief in the "divine intuitive quality of every human mind."²²

To Bancroft, the great historical mission of the Jacksonian Democracy was to assure the final triumph of that great wisdom which dwelt within the American people. In his celebrated eulogy of Andrew Jackson, Bancroft spoke of the Old Hero as the providential instrument through which that wisdom gained its expression:

Before the nation, before the world, before the ages he stands forth as the representative of his generation of the American mind, and the secret of his greatness is this: by intuitive conception, he shared and possessed all the creative ideas of his country and his time; he expressed them with dauntless intrepidity; he enforced them with an immovable will; he executed them with an electric power that attracted and swayed the American people.

To men of the Jacksonian faith, Old Hickory symbolized the popular will incarnate and embodied all the wisdom and virtue of the common people of the land.²³

With their belief in the virtual infallibility of the majority judgment, Jacksonian partisans regarded refusal to follow strictly the wishes of the people a grave offense against republican virtue and hastened to condemn those opposition politicians found guilty of such independence of thought or action. In the Jacksonian conception,

²²George Bancroft, Literary and Historical Miscellanies (New York, 1855), pp. 408-435; Merle Curti, Probing Our Past (New York, 1955), p. 10.

²³Bancroft, p. 479.

legislators were chosen, not to deliberate upon the political issues of the day, but to follow without question to course dictated by "the people." One upstate New York journal gave rather extreme expression to this view of the political process when it denounced "those juntos and combinations in every town, city and county within our state" whose members wickedly sought "to think and act for the people." The editor reported in alarm that such aristocrats persistently endeavored "to direct public opinion instead of following it." Such perverse dissension from the majority view, in his opinion, had "hitherto left us at war among ourselves, against our own interests and the interests of our country" and should not be tolerated. Had this editor's viewpoint been accepted literally by most Americans of the 1830's, there might have been greater truthfulness in de Tocqueville's remarks concerning the "tyranny of the majority." Fortunately, most Jacksonians believed in the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution with as much fervor as they accorded their conception of majority rule.²⁴

But since they regarded it as their mission to assure the final triumph of the rule of the people, the Jacksonians were, from the very outset of Old Hickory's administration, preoccupied with political reforms designed to assure that the popular voice would never be disregarded by governmental agents. To prevent a recurrence of the "corrupt bargain" of 1825 which had resulted "in the betrayal of the popular mandate," Jacksonians frequently advocated the elimination of the electoral college and the direct election of the President of the United States by popular vote. Some, hoping to render politicians more

²⁴Troy Register, quoted in The New York Sentinel, April 29, 1830.

responsive to the wishes of their constituents, demanded annual or biennial elections of all members of Congress, senators included. Others insisted that Congressmen unwilling to heed the wishes of their constituents on specific issues should consider themselves morally obligated to resign their seats. One Democratic journal even expressed concern over the malapportionment of Congress and called for legislation insuring uniformity in the number of people represented by congressional districts. On the state level, Jacksonians agitated for the final elimination of property qualifications for the franchise and the extension of voting rights to all white, male citizens.²⁵

There were some within the Jacksonian movement, however, who never fully accepted that unqualified belief in the infallibility of the majority commonly associated with Jacksonian Democracy. Condy Raguet, a Jacksonian partisan during most, though not all, of the period, lamented the tendency in a Democracy to entrust vital governmental decisions to politicians who knew nothing of "the true principles of political economy" and followed popular prejudices rather than sound judgment in their policy making. Raguet argued that no person not well versed in the writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo should be permitted to serve as a legislator, judge or executive.²⁶

William C'Sullivan, editor of the Democratic Review, though generally in sympathy with the principle of majority rule, recognized the possibility of majority oppression of minority rights. C'Sullivan

²⁵The Globe, January 19, March 2, 1831; The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 26, 84.

²⁶Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind In American Civilization (New York, 1946), II, 602.

declared that Democracy should never be construed to mean "the government of a people permitted in the plenitude of their power to do all they please, regardless alike of the restraint of written law or individual right." O'Sullivan's defense of the rule of King Numbers was based largely on the Jeffersonian conviction that there was a greater danger of minority oppression of the majority than of majority tyranny.²⁷

Orestes Brownson, though still loyal to the Jacksonian standard, rejected majority Democracy completely in the early 1840's. Embittered, perhaps by the failure of the people to sustain the Democratic cause in 1840, Brownson wrote in the Democratic Review that "this virtue and intelligence of the people is all a humbug." Following John C. Calhoun, Brownson argued that absolute Democracy and Liberty were incompatible. Majority rule, given the credulous ignorance of the masses, could easily lead to domination of the state by the strongest economic interest group and to the betrayal of the real interests of the common man. Restraint of government and strict construction of the Constitution, not majority rule, constituted, in the judgment of this Jacksonian, the only truly effective protection against aristocratic despotism. For rather different reasons, this belief had its greatest currency among conservative Southern Democrats who feared that one day the majority will of the nation would threaten their "peculiar institution." Many Southerners, of both parties, grimly approved of John C. Calhoun's blunt pronouncement, "The will of a majority is the will of a rabble. Progressive democracy is incompatible with liberty."²⁸

²⁷The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 4-6.

²⁸Ibid., VI (September, 1839), 213; XII (April, 1843), 375; John S. Jenkins, The Life of John Caldwell Calhoun (Auburn, 1850), p. 453.

Even so, radical majoritarianism remained the hallmark of the Jacksonian creed. In fact, there were some within the Jacksonian camp who regarded the judiciary's independence of the popular will with deep apprehensions and, fearing the creation of an aristocracy of judges and lawyers, called for the elimination of life tenure and the extension of the elective principle to all judicial offices. "Judges," declared the Globe,

must be made to feel responsible to majority opinion. . . . as a separate estate, the judges have no common feeling with the mass of the people. They become naturally hostile to popular power. Every encroachment they can make upon it, is felt by the judges as an acquisition--as consolidating the government--and as securing the permanence of their own interests and importance. Against this spirit, the people can never be safe, unless the judges, like the functionaries of other departments of government are required periodically to lay down their power, and be made to rely, when thus reduced to the ranks, upon the favorable estimate which a faithful discharge of their public trusts may have produced among the people, for subsequent advancement and restoration to power.²⁹

The Supreme Court was by no means excepted from these demands. Jacksonian spokesmen often deplored the exalted status of that tribunal and questioned the wisdom of the judicial review of legislation. The Democratic Review, commenting upon the "blind veneration which has heretofore sealed the eyes of a very large proportion of the public" declared of the high prestige enjoyed by the court: "This abject mental subjugation to authority and assumption is unworthy equally of our country and our age." Martin Van Buren, speaking before the Senate in 1826, deprecated "that sentiment which claims for judges so great a share of exemption from the feelings that govern the conduct of other

²⁹The Globe, February 29, 1831; Richmond Enquirer, quoted in The Globe, April 20, 1831; New York Evening Post, October 2, 1832.

men, and for the court the safest repository of political power." Van Buren declared that the justices were "influenced by the same passions" as other mortals. He warned of the "grave dangers" of placing them beyond the reach of public opinion. A Jacksonian daily charged that the Supreme Court gave "whatever construction to the Constitution as might suit the political views of the tribunal," and accused the jurists of subservience to vested interests. The court, it was declared, "can annul any law desired by the people by declaring it unconstitutional, and has done so." Other Jacksonian writers protested "the anti-Democratic tone of principle" which characterized the decisions of the court. The Dartmouth College Case, which placed chartered corporations beyond the reach of "the sovereign legislation of the people" and *McCulloch versus Maryland*, which placed federally chartered bodies beyond the reach of the states' power to tax were deemed especially subversive of popular rule. Many Jacksonian publicists also demanded that law be rendered more humane in its treatment of the poor and called for the abolition of imprisonment for debt.³⁰

The necessity of rendering government more responsive to the will of the governed was also invoked to justify the most controversial of Jacksonian "innovations": rotation in office, or, as it was termed by its opponents, the spoils system. The Globe explained that this reform involved nothing more nor less than "putting men out of office

³⁰United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1838), 143-161; The Globe, February 2, 1831; The Banner of the Constitution, quoted in the New York Evening Post, October 2, 1832; Martin Van Buren, The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D. C., 1920), pp. 212-214; Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, History of the Locofoco or Equal Rights Party (New York, 1842), pp. 121-122.

who are hostile to the principles upon which the people would have their government founded and conducted, and putting others in, whose opinions coincide with those of a majority of their countrymen." Employing the ubiquitous conspiracy theme, Jacksonian apologists explained that there existed among incumbent civil servants a plot to create an aristocratic federal bureaucracy of arrogant office holders who deemed themselves "born, booted and spurred to ride the common people." One Jacksonian paper in New England, warning to this theme, cried for the punishment of all "traitors" and screamed, "The barnacles shall be swept clean from the ship of state."³¹

Protesting that no government official should ever be allowed to regard his post as a "sinecure for life," the Jacksonians quoted freely from Jefferson, who earlier had been attracted to Harrington's belief in "rotation in office." Old Hickory justified the Jacksonian conversion to a permanent federal bureaucracy on the grounds that the tasks of government were, after all, so simple that any reasonably intelligent citizen could perform them without specialized training or experience. Jackson, by no means in favor of the ruthless wholesale proscriptions demanded by some of his more opportunistic followers, endeavored to follow a policy of reasonable moderation. His opponents greatly exaggerated the extent of his removals. But nonetheless, Jackson remained most sensitive to the dangers he deemed inherent in the creation of a bureaucracy beyond the reach of the popular will. The

³¹The Globe, May 14, 1831; New Orleans Courier, quoted in The Globe, November 24, 1831; The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 82; The New Hampshire Patriot, March 21, 1829.

Jacksonian creed offered ample justification of the need for "rotation in office."³²

It is perhaps ironic that Andrew Jackson, titular leader of a political movement which preached the Jeffersonian doctrine of limited government, contributed mightily to the strengthening of the presidential office and is remembered as a "strong executive." The Jacksonians were well aware of this development and deemed it quite consistent with their general philosophy of government. Since politicians and bureaucrats were disposed to plot the subversion of the liberties of the people, Jacksonians argued, the President, as the elected representative of all the people, must not hesitate to use the full powers of his office to guard the republic against their "encroachments and pretensions." Jackson, declaring that "the President is the direct representative of the American people," deemed it his duty to strike down, through use of the veto power, legislation he deemed either unconstitutional or unwise and to use his control of the Executive branch of government to arrest tendencies dangerous to republican government. In expounding this viewpoint to a highly hostile Senate, Jackson assured the Senators that, having faithfully employed the full powers of his office in resistance to the encroachments of privilege and governmental centralization, he would "die contented" with the belief "that he had contributed in some degree to increase the value and prolong the duration of American liberty."³³

³²U.S., Congress, Senate, Senate Documents, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., I, No. 1; Andrew Jackson to Joseph Conn Guild, April 24, 1825, Jackson MSS (microfilmed by the Library of Congress).

³³U.S., Congress, Senate, Register of Debates, 23d Cong., 1st Sess., X, pp. 3317-3336.

Senator Thomas Hart Benton, faithful Jacksonian legislative leader, from Missouri, defended his chieftain's conception of the presidency against those who charged Jackson with despotic abuse of executive power in his "excessive" use of the veto power by likening the "venerable Hero" to the enlightened lawgivers of antiquity. Benton contended that Jackson had instructed the people in the "true meaning" of their "revered Constitution:"

From General Jackson [Benton declared] the country first learned the true theory and practice of intent of the Constitution, in giving to the executive a qualified negative on the legislative power of Congress. Far from being an odious, dangerous or kingly prerogative this power, as vested in the President, is nothing but a copy of the famous veto power vested in the tribunes of the people among the Romans.

Jacksonian journalists, taking up the refrain, proclaimed Old Hickory the "providential guardian" of true freedom and rejoiced in the mercies of heaven in providing the people with such a champion. Popular approval of the Jacksonian conception of executive power was clearly a reflection of the deep feeling that Jackson, totally responsive to the popular will, could be relied upon in all cases to serve their interests. The General, it was believed, shared the innermost hopes, fears and aspirations of the common man. As a recent historian has aptly expressed it, "the American people looked through his eyes and thought with his brain."³⁴

In a sense, Andrew Jackson, the Hero of New Orleans and the living symbol of republican simplicity and American virtue, symbolized also a nationalist fervor that cut across sectionalist animosities and provincial prejudices. Though the Civil War was to arrest this

³⁴Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years View (New York, 1854), I, 723-724; Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (New York, 1950), I, 472.

development, by the Jacksonian years Americans nonetheless were beginning to feel the stirrings of that sense of a common nationality which reached its fullest ante-bellum expression in Manifest Destiny. As early as 1824, Jackson's partisans had hailed their hero as a truly national leader who stood above the sectional antagonisms of North, South, East and West. Of course, Jackson supporters had not hesitated to exploit sectional prejudices in those localities where such practices remained good politics. An Alabama electioneering handbill in 1828 proclaimed, "Huzzah for Jackson and to hell with the Yankee." But in general their strategy was to portray Jackson as a national hero and a national leader devoted to the high destinies of a unified nation.³⁵

Thus, from the outset, strong nationalist fervor ameliorated the Jacksonians' devotion to the states rights philosophy. When in 1833, the Nullification crisis forced a choice between extreme adherence to states rights or the continuation of the federal union, most, though not all, Jacksonians chose the latter alternative and applauded their leader's fiery determination to "hang disunionists high as Haman." Jacksonian journals thereafter classified "Centralization and Nullification" as "twin conspiracies against the Constitution and the liberties of the people."³⁶

Andrew Jackson summarized the Jacksonian political mission in a sentence: "The federal Constitution must be obeyed, states rights

³⁵Paul C. Nagel, "The Election of 1824: A Reconsideration Based on Newspaper Opinion," The Journal of Southern History, XXVI (August, 1960), 315-324.

³⁶Vienna Republican, quoted in The Globe, June 11, 1831; New York Evening Post, August 19, 1834.

preserved, our national debt must be paid, direct loans and taxes avoided and the Federal Union preserved." In explaining their role in the main stream of American history and in justifying the Jacksonian program, the followers of Old Hickory invoked various interpretative themes: that government is best which governs least; those who propose to extend the scope of federal activity conspire against liberty and are in the tradition of Tory aristocracy and New England Federalism; those who resist such encroachments alone are the guardians of the American tradition and the heirs of Jeffersonian Republicanism; governmental activity can by its nature benefit only the powerful and lead to aristocracy; the people must therefore look to their own efforts for the solution of their problems and not to government; officers of government must be made totally responsible to the people; elected representatives must reflect popular opinion; all these precepts must be rigorously obeyed, lest despotism and aristocracy subvert true republican liberty.³⁷

Certain images reinforced these themes: the frugal, hard working republican citizen versus the decadent, effete, scheming aristocrat; the honest, intelligent, practical self-taught man versus the snobbish, foolish and impractical academician; the courageous Old General, devoted body and soul to the preservation of the republic versus the hypocritical, self-seeking politician in league with aristocracy, secretly conspiring its downfall.

Jacksonian rhetoric thus provided a facade of unity and an illusion of common purpose which fused the party into a cohesive political organization. Yet beneath the façade lay basically

³⁷ Morison and Commager, I, 472.

contradictory economic objectives which were never successfully reconciled. As we turn to the Jacksonian interpretation of the economic issues of the period, these cleavages within the ranks will become most apparent.

Jacksonian writers denounced freely the opposition for its adherence to programs designed to facilitate the exploitation of the "people" and of "the productive classes of society" by "speculators," "monopolists" and "aristocrats." Jacksonian journals repeatedly castigated the "corrupt alliance" of vested interests and government which was said to sustain the opposition cause. The special privileges enjoyed by chartered corporations, the unique prerogatives of the Second Bank of the United States, and the aid given to economic interests through governmental tariff and internal improvement legislation were assailed, with increasing frequency as the 1830's progressed, as part and parcel of a gigantic conspiracy to defraud the honest and productive citizens of the Republic for the benefit of corrupt and scheming members of the Eastern mercantile community.

In denunciation of this conspiracy, a gathering of the Jacksonian faithful in a rural county in Pennsylvania resolved in the spring of 1831, that

. . . a great and imposing "system," conceived in wickedness and supported by iniquity, is taught with untiring assiduity, and, if successful, will be productive of unheard and endless calamity to the laboring people of this country, and would be as portentous to every well-informed patriot as the death knell of our civil and religious blessings. In its train it would bring taxation to everything used by the laboring classes even to the very air they breathe, or the light of the sun--speculation, corruption and intrigue in the government--extravagance, profligacy and vice in the money lender and stock jobber--penury, oppression and misery in the poorer and humbler classes--in short, the direct tendency of the "system" so called would be to fleece the people--to rob

the industrious laborer of his hire, and give it to the rich and the purse proud . . . every intrigue and deception is practiced to divide and mislead the people, thereby to weaken their power and divert them from their true interests . . . there is a greedy and unprincipled band of speculators abroad in the land, eager to despoil the people by every kind of false device.³⁸

James M. Polk, in a speech before the House of Representatives, explained in detail how the "system" (labeled the American System by its proponents) fostered that exploitation of the "productive classes" deplored in the foregoing resolution. By artificially supporting a high price on the public lands, Polk argued, the Adams-Clay policies prevented "inducements to immigration," thereby retaining "a population of paupers in the East, who may, of necessity, be driven into manufactories, to labor at low wages for their daily bread." By legislating excessive duties on imports, the proponents of the system would then enable the owners of the "manufactories" to charge exorbitant prices for the products thus produced by cheap labor. The tariff would also serve to create a surplus of revenue in the federal coffers. That revenue was then expended on "internal improvements," the bait held out to the West to gain their acceptance of the "iniquitous system." In reality, Polk argued, the system would benefit only the vested interest groups of the East. The farmer of the West, the planter of the South and the laborer throughout the nation would be driven to destitution by the policies advocated by the Jacksonian opposition.³⁹

To the argument advanced by Whig partisans that the American System would benefit all classes and all sections, a spokesman for the

³⁸Republican Farmer, quoted in The Globe, April 16, 1831.

³⁹U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 698-699.

Southern agrarians, Francis Pickens, cried on the floor of the House: "Let no man deceive himself by the plausible and beautiful theory that all classes in the body politic have a mutual dependence . . . let no man suppose that that which adds power and profit to a specie of capital necessarily has a corresponding effect upon labor. . . ." Others were more specific. A New York Jacksonian paper accused the followers of Clay and Adams of oppressing the common people of the land by inflicting upon the nation an exorbitant tariff which forced the price of everyday necessities beyond the reach of the poor man's budget. A Pennsylvania journal charged that "Henry Clay's American System" extorted from the "working people \$35,000,000 a year, and lavished a great part of it upon political favorites and the rank aristocracy of the cities."⁴⁰

There were many within the Jacksonian camp, however, who supported the very "American System" their brethren denounced. At no time were the Jacksonians united on their tariff, land or internal improvement policies. When Jackson in 1830 vetoed an unimportant bill authorizing the construction of the Maysville road in Kentucky, many of his staunchest Western supporters raised their voices in protest. Indeed, two years before, Amos Kendall's Argus of Western America had assured Westerners concerned with obtaining federal appropriations for turnpikes and canals that Old Hickory was a firm believer in the American System and defied those who said otherwise to "produce even a newspaper paragraph" advocating Jackson's election on the grounds of

⁴⁰U.S., Congress, Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2d Sess., Appendix, pp. 429-430; New York Evening Post, October 5, 1835; Wilkes-barre Farmer, quoted in the Democratic State Journal, May 11, 1835.

his opposition to protection or internal improvements. In Pennsylvania, where politicians of both parties generally attempted to appear as friends of tariff protection, Jackson was widely hailed as a staunch believer in domestic industry and protective legislation. When it later appeared that the General's position was rather equivocal, Jacksonian journals pleaded that only Jackson could save the protective tariff from the nullifiers who would wipe out protection altogether.⁴¹

The Jacksonian position on these issues was left comfortably vague, so that adjustments could be made to meet the exigencies of the local political situation. That situation made feasible opposition to the American System in the East, where Jackson labor supporters blamed it for inflation and where some mercantile interests felt an increase in the tariff level might disrupt commerce, and in the South, where the planters tended to blame protection for their increasingly unfavorable economic situation. It dictated some equivocation on this issue in industrial Pennsylvania, where the tariff was believed essential to prosperity, and in the West, where the desire for internal improvement legislation was widespread.⁴²

If Jacksonian spokesmen often cried that the American System threatened the well-being of the honest citizen of the land, the most heated Jacksonian outbursts were reserved for denunciation of the machinations of bankers and speculators. A New York journal declared:

We shall never be a truly free and happy people while subject, as we are now, to bank domination. No system could possibly be devised more certainly fatal to the great

⁴¹National Intelligencer, June 18, 1830; Argus of Western America, September 10, 1838; American Sentinel, July 18, 1832.

⁴²New York Evening Post, November 5, 1832.

principle upon which our government rests--the glorious principle of equal rights--than the banking system. It is hostile to morals, it is hostile to freedom . . . it fosters a spirit of speculation, destructive of love of country--a spirit which paralyzes all the ardent and generous impulses of our nature and creates instead a sordid and rapacious desire to gain, to minister to the unstable cravings of which becomes the sole aim of existence. . . . Either the bank system . . . shall be put down, or the days of democracy are numbered.⁴³

A Pennsylvania editor charged that banks served only to:

make the world dishonest and profligate--to increase crime and licentiousness; to make industry tributary to idleness and give vice a supremacy over virtue . . . and to increase to a vast extent the tendency in society to the extremes of wealth and poverty.

Invariably, Jacksonian publicists called for the "reform" of the nation's banking system. But never were they in agreement as to the nature of that reform. The most conflicting of motives lie behind their denunciation of the abuses of banking.⁴⁴

The campaign to prevent the recharter of the second Bank of the United States afforded the most dramatic and persistent expression of the Jacksonian hostility to the existing banking system. The Bank was condemned as a "hydra of corruption," and "engine of aristocracy" and as "a deadly menace to Republican government." Its charter was found to be unconstitutional, a dangerous example of the encroachments of federal power. The special privileges which the charter conferred upon the Bank's stockholders were deemed unjust, productive of inequality and of the "ultimate triumph of aristocracy." Ownership of bank stock by foreigners was denounced as an ominous threat to continued American

⁴³Ibid., August 6, 26, 1834.

⁴⁴Wilkesbarre Republican Farmer, July 5, 1837, quoted in Charles McCool Snyder, The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics 1833-1843 (Harrisburg, 1958), p. 90.

independence. The Bank's political activities, which allegedly involved the bribery of editors and politicians to assure re-charter, were said to threaten free government. And its encouragement and facilitation of speculation were held responsible for the "destruction of public morality." Though some of Jackson's political intimates refused to concur in Old Hickory's veto of the re-charter bill, the Jacksonian press soon made hostility to the Bank of the United States and to its president, Nicholas Biddle, the test of true Jacksonian loyalty.⁴⁵

To some Jacksonians, the great sin of the Bank was its emission of paper currency. Reflecting a deep agrarian distrust of banking institutions reinforced by bitter experiences with "rag money," these Jackson partisans were quite opposed to banks of issue of any sort, national or state. They regarded bank notes as a fraudulent deception perpetrated by speculators intent upon fleecing the "producing classes of society." This faction of the Jacksonian party frequently demanded the complete suppression of such notes, or at least their restriction to certificates of high denomination. Their conception of an ideal monetary system was one based upon an exclusively metallic currency. Charles Jared Ingersoll expressed their convictions when he declared:

The effort to coin money out of paper is as absurd as alchemy. Nothing can make a promise on paper to pay a dollar equal to an actual dollar . . . all paper money not immediately convertible into coin is of no value and its credit is merely fictitious. The use of it is like substituting ardent spirits for solid food as the sustenance of life. It intoxicates and ruins.

This opposition to paper money came from two elements within the Jacksonian coalition: conservative agrarians who regarded banks of

⁴⁵The Globe, May 4, 7, 1831.

issue as questionable and dangerous "innovations" destructive of republican virtue, and urban "workingmen's" groups--actually composed of members of the so-called "productive classes": laborers, mechanics, merchants and even a few professional people who believed that banks of issue were responsible for economic fluctuations injurious to their interests.⁴⁶

Speaking for the old line agrarians, Willie Blount, a Tennessee Jacksonian, expressed the agrarian's deep suspicion of banking in general when he wrote to Jackson late in 1831: "My notion of all banks is, away with their charters, that causes for corruption and aristocracy may be lessened." This attitude toward banking led to the enactment, in several Western states, of legislation outlawing banking altogether. Regarding land and labor as the sole legitimate sources of wealth, the die-hard agrarians were essentially pre-capitalist in their basic economic attitudes.⁴⁷

Many urban laborers and artisans fully shared the agrarian's distaste for banks and bank notes. The New York Workingmen's Advocate, speaking for the wage earners of the city, declared "paper money" the "greatest enemy of the workingman." Not only did the issuance of

⁴⁶William M. Meigs, The Life of Charles Jared Ingersoll (Philadelphia, 1897), pp. 200-201.

⁴⁷Willie Blount to Andrew Jackson, 1831, Jackson MSS (micro-filmed by the Library of Congress); Benton, II, 60; Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War (Princeton, 1957), pp. 605-630. Hammond's work provides a much needed corrective to the erroneous notion that Western agrarians during the Jackson era were generally in favor of inflation and paper currency. Not until after the Civil War did agrarian leaders come to favor a paper money inflation, and then only because they were assured that the backing of the federal government would assure a standard paper currency of guaranteed value.

"rag money" force the price of necessities beyond the wage earners' reach, but, as William Leggett explained, employers frequently paid their workers in obscure and badly depreciated notes "in order to avoid paying them as large a proportion as possible of their just wages." And, to add insult to injury, banks refused to grant credit to working people in times of adversity. In urban centers across the country--New York, Boston, Philadelphia--"workingmen's" parties raised the cry that banks of issue exploited ruthlessly the "productive classes of the nation."⁴³

Their appeal was by no means limited to members of the wage earner class. Regarding all who engaged in "productive" activity of any sort as "workingmen" these urban "labor" leaders solicited and apparently received support from other urban groups. There were some merchants and professional people who blamed the rapidly rising cost of living on the inflationary pressures created by the over-issuance of bank currency. Others blamed the banks for economic fluctuations destructive to their economic interests. Condy Raguet, editor of the Free Trade Advocate condemned banks of issue for victimizing "honest merchants" who were "obliged to submit to all the evils of a contraction consequent to an expansion, which they had no agency in producing." Among middle class Americans of this viewpoint, the South Sea Bubble was frequently cited as the classic demonstration of the

⁴³Workingman's Advocate, October 31, 1829, July 19, 1831, June 6, 1833, March 4, September 5, 1835; Lan, March 22, August 8, 1834; New York Evening Post, August 6, 26, 1834, August 6, 1840; New York Courier and Enquirer, October 23, 1829; Byrdsall, pp. 27, 73, 75-76, 102, 112.

pernicious nature of banking and speculation.⁴⁹

Both agrarian and urban advocates of hard money were attracted to the Jacksonian crusade against the Bank of the United States. But in joining the Jacksonian cause they gave expression to their hostility to banks of issue in general. George Henry Evans expressed their conviction when he declared:

Local banks with a U. S. Bank are bad enough; without one, it may be they would be still worse . . . a blow which reaches the U. S. Bank and not the local banks may only be a blow in favor of the Wall Street brokers.

To Evans and others of this persuasion, all banks were involved in a conspiracy to defraud the public and exploit the "producing classes" and were thus all equally guilty. In the word of Theophilus Fisk, Jr., banks, banking and paper money were wicked "labor saving devices" by which "drones are enabled to grow rich without honest industry."⁵⁰

However, there were many within the Jacksonian coalition who did not share these conceptions, and were motivated by quite different considerations in joining the crusade against the Bank of the United States. The Workingman's Advocate in 1834 charged, with no little truthfulness, that the Democratic party in New York was controlled by "miscreants who merely oppose the present bank that they may profit from the erection of another." Nor was such opportunism limited to New York alone. In Massachusetts, David Henshaw, leader of the Jacksonians of the Bay State, followed a vitriolic attack on the "monied monster" with

⁴⁹Free Trade Advocate, July 4, 1829; New York Evening Journal, quoted in The Globe, April 2, 1831; New York Daily Sentinel, February 15, 16, 22, March 6, 10, 1830; Byrdsall, pp. vi, 13, 15, 46, 52-53, 88, 104.

⁵⁰Workingman's Advocate, April 7, 1831, January 26, 1833; Byrdsall, p. 20.

proposals for the creation of a new national bank controlled by Jackson's political allies. Henshaw and others of his ilk had no objections to a national bank as such. Their opposition to the re-charter of Biddle's institution was based solely on the fact that they had no opportunity to profit personally from its continuation.⁵¹

In supporting their case, Henshaw and his followers argued that it was both unjust and undemocratic to exclude the people of the nation from the opportunity to compete in purchasing stock in the "national banking monopoly." Jackson, though personally opposed to any national bank, echoed their point of view in his message in defense of the veto of the re-charter bill when he argued that to extend the privileges of Biddle's institution would unjustly "exclude the whole American people from competition in the purchase of this monopoly."⁵²

Jacksonian opposition to the re-chartering of the Bank appealed also to certain state banking interests who had good reason to oppose the existence of any federally chartered banking institution whatsoever. Control of the funds of the federal government had given Biddle the power to regulate and restrain the indiscriminate issuance of paper currency by other bankers. As one highly perceptive foreign observer noted, the Bank of the United States exercised "control over the local banks," "obliging them to restrain their emissions by calling upon them for specie, or by refusing to receive their bills when the issues are excessive." To more speculative operators, such controls

⁵¹Workingman's Advocate, February 1, March 29, April 5, 1834; David Henshaw, Remarks upon the Bank of the United States (Boston, 1831); Hammond, pp. 326-368.

⁵²U.S., Congress, Senate, Journal of the Senate of the United States, 22d Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 433-446.

were an intolerable restriction on their freedom of enterprise. From the outset of the campaign against the Bank, Jacksonian editors sought to appeal to state banking interests by charging that the special privileges enjoyed by Biddle's institution--exemption from taxation and custody of the federal deposits--gave his bank "an advantage over our local banks prejudicial alike to these banks and to the interests of the states." Roger B. Taney, Jackson's Attorney General and Secretary of the Treasury, spoke to their interests also when he declared: "There is perhaps no business which yields a profit so certain and liberal as the business of banking and exchange; and it is proper that it should be open as far as practicable to the most free competition and its advantages shared by all classes of society."⁵³

To one faction within the Jacksonian alliance, the Bank warranted destruction as the largest bank of issue and the greatest sinner against economic morality. To another, its great offense was its restraint of the activities of other banks of issue. To some Jacksonians, Nicholas Biddle was an object of loathing as the personification of the banker and the speculator. Other Jacksonians loathed Biddle because of his use of the Bank's power to curb the banking and speculative activities of others. Far from desiring the elimination of "rag money," these Jacksonians hoped to profit from an extension of banking activity unrestrained and unregulated by any nationally incorporated banking institution. Opposition to "monopoly"--that is, to grants of special privilege which would exclude all save a happy few from the scramble for wealth, not hostility to commerce or speculation, explain

⁵³Nichol Chevalier, Society, Politics and Manners in the United States (Boston, 1839), p. 45; The Globe, April 30, May 4, June 4, 1831; Hammond, p. 338.

their Jacksonian partisanship.

Despite the involvement of many of their own partisans in the speculative manias of their day, the Jacksonian press commonly endeavored to identify their political opposition with the shoddier, more questionable aspects of a commercial society while claiming for themselves the virtues of the agrarian republic of Jefferson. A campaign publication of 1840 charged that "nine tenths of the non-producers, those who get their living by their wits . . . by swindling the more virtuous and worthy part of the community are Whigs." A New York Jacksonian paper deplored the depravity of the new commercial aristocracy:

If affluence were the common reward of honest industry, and if talent and perseverance were the sole or even the chief requisite to give a man a place in the ranks of the aristocracy . . . then idle and worthless ones only would complain of their situation. But the case is widely different. Hypocrisy is a money making quality. Time serving is a money making occupation. Cunning brings in cash. Land speculators, stock jobbers, lottery managers, usurers and other men of a similar stripe amass the greatest fortunes . . . at the expense of the truly productive classes of society.

Only by getting "rid of all scruples . . . never stopping at using a mean trick for a good paymaster" while "covering up all, snug and close, by saintly professions," could one succeed, in the depraved, amoral commercial society of the times, the editor concluded.⁵⁴

A strong note of nostalgia for the agrarian past coupled with intense aversion for the commercial present permeated many Jacksonian writings. Though regarding the small merchant and manufacturer without much rancor--they were in a sense members of productive classes that "lived by honest labor"--many partisans of Jackson could neither

⁵⁴The Crisis, March 16, 1840; New York Daily Sentinel, March 4, 1830.

understand nor accept the need for speculators, promoters and bankers who lived by the manipulation of money and credit. They were not "honest workers"; their wealth did not come from "useful service to society." In the judgment of many supporters of Jackson, they could be regarded only as undesirable social parasites and as "enemies to true republicanism."⁵⁵

Old Hickory occasionally enunciated their viewpoint. When, following the removal of the federal deposits from the Bank of the United States, a contraction of credit led to widespread distress in commercial centers, Jackson rejoiced in the discomfort of the wicked, remarking to a political associate: "The failures that are now taking place are among the stock jobbers, brokers and gamblers, and would to God they were all swept from the land."⁵⁶

If Jacksonian partisans were quick to condemn their opponents as the products of urban, commercial decadence and parasitism, they were equally diligent in praising their own leaders for their fidelity to the agrarian way of life. Andrew Jackson was frequently compared to Cincinnatus, the simple, heroic farmer who left his plow to heed his country's desperate call. The Democratic Review rejoiced that "the earliest sympathies of Thomas Hart Benton were with the plough and planter." Even William Leggett, New York leader of a radical urban Jacksonian faction, was praised, by his earliest biographer, as one who "having been nurtured in moderate circumstances, unspoiled and unpampered by the seductions of affluence "had remained true to the

⁵⁵New York Daily Sentinel, March 23, 1830; The Globe, June 21, 1831; Andrew Jackson, Correspondence (New York, 1914), II, 118; Samuel Putnam Waldo, Lemoirs of Andrew Jackson (New Haven, 1818), p. 14.

⁵⁶James A. Hamilton, Reminiscences (New York, 1869), p. 118..

republican faith." His early experiences as a "woodsman in the wilds of the West" were cited as further explanation of Leggett's hardy self-reliance and courage, virtues deemed "so alien to the spoiled aristocrat."⁵⁷

Jacksonian spokesmen, in questioning the moral rectitude of the man who acquired sudden affluence through sharp trading or astute speculation, invoked a dualism between the "productive" and "non-productive" classes of society which betrayed strong overtones of a class conflict interpretation of history. However, it must be stressed that the villain, in Jacksonian rhetoric, was not the owner of the means of production (as the Marxists would have it), but the sinner against the old agrarian morality of frugality, simplicity and hard work who sought a short cut to wealth.

To be sure, the more radical Jacksonians not infrequently denounced the exploitation of the artisan and the mechanic by the mercantile and entrepreneurial classes. Crestes Brownson went so far as to declare the employer the natural enemy of the working man, while Frances Wright's Free Enquirer proclaimed "the present is acknowledgedly a war of class . . . it is the ridden of the earth who are struggling to throw from their backs the booted and spurred riders whose legitimate title to starve as well as work then to death will no longer pass current." But the solution was usually found, not in a class conscious political movement determined to use governmental power to secure social justice, but in return to the agrarian Republic of Jefferson and in fidelity to the principles of laissez faire.

⁵⁷United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 86; Leggett, I, v.

Brownson, who endorsed the Lockean conception of a natural and just identity of property interests and governmental power, ascribed the social injustices of his day to the emergence of a large propertyless class. This he related to the gradual disappearance of the frontier with its limitless opportunities for the sustenance of an independent yeomanry, and hinted that social revolution must follow its final exhaustion. However, Brownson and other radicals within the Jacksonian camp went no further in their talk of "revolution" than to toy with a scheme for the abolition of inheritance, a measure designed to prevent the appearance of oppressive inequalities of wealth. Even this measure gained very little support and was quickly dropped.

For the most part, Brownson and other Jacksonian radicals rested on the assumption that if only special legislation granting governmental favors to privileged individuals would cease, the "natural and immutable laws of trade" would again assure that honest labor and diligent industry received their due. Though their program called for some measure of government restriction upon the activities of bankers and speculators and for certain humanitarian reforms such as abolition of imprisonment for debt, they did not basically conceive of governmental activity as the key to the attainment of social justice. The fear of strong government was too pervasive. The political economist Theodore Sedgwick, Sr., a Jacksonian partisan, expressed a common Jacksonian conviction when he urged workingmen, oppressed by the low living standards of the unpropertied city masses to avoid dissipation and frivolity, cultivate frugality, accumulate capital, and thereby gain their independence through the purchase of land and the pursuit of

agriculture, that noblest of all callings.⁵⁸

Despite the prominence of agrarianism as a theme of Jacksonian political protest, the Jacksonians were by no means unified in regarding the protection of the agrarian republic as the great historical task of the movement. The Democracy of the Jacksonian era recruited its supporters from highly diverse sectional and economic interest groups. Each faction within the alliance had its own conception of the purpose of the Jacksonian crusade and its own interpretation of the historical mission of the Jacksonian Democracy.

To some, the primary task of the Democracy was the assurance of the continued supremacy of landed wealth over mercantile and financial capital. Profoundly apprehensive of the growing power of commerce and industry, resentful of the pretensions of the nouveau riche this group was attracted to the Jacksonian movement out of opposition to the American System and the Bank of the United States, measures believed to threaten their interests. Devoted to states rights and to strict construction of the Constitution, this element often entered into uneasy alliance with the egalitarian radicals of the movement largely out of conviction that only the sovereign power of the whole people could check the growing power of capital. James Fenimore Cooper was representative of this viewpoint.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Free Enquirer, November 27, 1830; Boston Quarterly Review, III (July, 1840), 358-395; III (October, 1840), 420-512; IV (January, 1841), 119-127; Theodore Sedgwick, Sr., Public and Private Economy (New York, 1836), II, 96, 106-131.

⁵⁹Of the many excellent studies of Cooper as a social critic, Marvin Meyers, "The Great Descent: A Version of Fenimore Cooper," The Pacific Spectator, X (Autumn, 1956), 367-381 is perhaps the most provocative.

The conservative agrarians of the South were moved by additional fear for their continued safety of their "peculiar institution." Extremists on the states rights issue, at times somewhat fearful of the radicalism of the Northern "urban labor" wing of the party, found the Jacksonian movement often disquieting. Not infrequently they sought temporary refuge in the ranks of the opposition. John C. Calhoun and John Tyler were their representative leaders.

Urban groups in the East--wage earners, mechanics, and some small businessmen--saw in the growing power of accumulated capital a grave threat to their dignity and position in society. The anti-monopoly crusade, agitation for hard money and appeals for judicial reform such as the abolition of imprisonment for debt and the enactment of effective labor lien laws expressed their demands for reform. Believing the concentration of capital in the hands of chartered banks and corporations conducive to the exploitation of the "producing" members of society, they called for governmental action to uproot privilege and restore economic opportunity. Radically egalitarian, this faction regarded the Jacksonian movement as the culmination of the democratic promise. Yet, economic justice as well as political equality was their objective. William Leggett, George H. Evans and Crestes Brownson were among their spokesmen.

The Jacksonian movement included in its ample ranks many who shared neither the agrarian's social ideal nor the radical's reform convictions. Attracted to the Bank crusade out of dislike for the Bank's restraint of enterprise and speculation, they balked at the desire of their more radical associates to place governmental restrictions upon corporate activity. Accepting thoroughly the capitalist,

speculative milieu of the day, these Jacksonians looked to the freeing of capitalist activity from mercantilistic restraint, not its restriction in the name of the agrarian ideals of the Old Republic or the visions of social justice of radical reformers. When, during the Van Buren administration, the Jacksonian party embraced the doctrines of Locofocoism with pride, many leaders of the entrepreneurial element were loud in their dissent. David Henshaw of Massachusetts and Nathan P. Tallmadge of New York were leaders of this Jacksonian faction.

There was no single contemporary interpretation of the meaning of Jacksonian Democracy to which all Jacksonians could swear their allegiance. To some, the movement was one of restoration of the Agrarian Republic of Jefferson. To others, its mission was the attainment of economic and social justice for the victims of the new commercial society. Still others saw its role as the liberation of enterprise from restraint. Some stressed political democracy, others economic reform. A few were primarily preoccupied with humanitarian uplift, and crusaded in the name of the Democracy against imprisonment for debt, judicial injustice and labor exploitation. Some were conservative, others liberal, a few even radical (by the standards of the times) in their conceptions of Democracy.

The Jacksonians were united in their acceptance of certain common themes, used to dramatize the party battles of the era. The preservation of the Jeffersonian Republic from the aristocratic conspiracy, the defense of the Constitution from its would-be-defilers, the protection of popular rule from incipient despotism, provided a facade of common unity. But beneath the façade lie the most discordant diversity.

CHAPTER II

PARTISAN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE JACKSONIAN

MOVEMENT: THE WHIGS

If the Democratic party of Jackson, Van Buren and Benton contained within its ample ranks the most disparate of elements--former Federalists and lifetime Jeffersonians, agrarians and nascent entrepreneurs, hard money advocates and inflationists--the Whig opposition represented a misalliance of almost totally incompatible elements. Both ultra-nationalists of the Webster school and extreme states rights advocates of the persuasion of Calhoun and Tyler, had by the mid-1830's rallied to the opposition banner. Inveterate enemies of "mob democracy" and firm advocates of the rule of the people alike claimed Whig alliance. Friends and foes of Nicholas Biddle and a national bank both could be found in the Whig ranks. Though claiming unity in resistance to "Jacksonian despotism" and the "reign of King Andrew," the Whig party was in fact united on none of the major issues of the period. Only their distaste for Andrew Jackson and his followers could cement together these diverse elements into a contradictory but somewhat cohesive political alliance. An hostile critic aptly termed the Whigs "a discordant combination of the odds and ends of all parties." As a consequence, there is no consistent Whig interpretation of the party battles of the Jackson era. Each faction within the

party held its own conception of the meaning of the hated Jacksonian movement.¹

John Quincy Adams noted in his diary early in 1834 that the prominent presidential aspirants within his party, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun, were "scarcely bound together by the brittle bond of opposition to the absurdities of the present incumbent." "Not one of them," in Adams' acrimonious judgment, possessed "a system of administration which he would care to avow" to the nation as a whole. Adams recognized tacitly that any such avowal would splinter or even shatter the tenuous Whig coalition. Thurlow Weed, writing in the Albany Evening Journal on the eve of the campaign of 1840, blatantly recognized that opportunism which the scholarly Adams deplored when he defined a good Whig as anyone who was convinced that the "Democrats should be driven from office."²

The national Republican party, which had preceded the Whigs in opposition to Jackson and his followers, had endeavored to win mass support for a program pledged to nationally financed internal improvements, tariff protection for American industry and the rechartering of the Bank of the United States. This nationalistic, essentially Hamiltonian appeal had failed to capture the imagination of the electorate. Henry Clay, writing to Nicholas Biddle in 1834, expressed the opinion that the opposition henceforth should place its primary emphasis upon the exposure of Andrew Jackson's unconstitutional and despotic

¹Richmond Enquirer, quoted in Niles Register, November 28, 1840.

²John Quincy Adams, Memoirs (Philadelphia, 1877), IV, 160; Albany Evening Journal, November 25, 1839; E. Malcolm Carrsall, The Origins of the Whig Party (Durham, 1925), pp. 172-173.

usurpations of power and avoid such divisive and unpopular matters as the proposed recharter of the Bank. The addition of such diverse elements as Northern anti-Masons, Southern nullifiers and a sprinkling of determined abolitionists to the ranks of the newly organized Whig party made such tactics not only attractive in their vote winning potential, but almost essential to the maintenance of party unity. It was not without reason that national party conventions scrupulously avoided public statements of policy. Nicholas Biddle, accepting fully Clay's strategy, and sensing victory in 1840, warned that the party's standard bearer should make no statements on controversial issues. General Harrison should be denied the use of "pen and ink" as if "he were a mad poet in bedlam."³

The argument ad hominem, then, became the stock in trade of the Whig journalist and stump speaker. In a sense, this strategy predated the party itself. Just as the Jacksonians had warned of the dangerous and unconstitutional conspiracies against republican government harbored by their opposition, so the enemies of Old Hickory and his cause had protested vehemently that the liberties of the nation could not endure the rule of a military despot. Even before Jackson had clearly emerged as a presidential candidate, his fiery temper and forceful personality had been a source of controversy. Henry Clay, alarmed by Jackson's excesses during the Indian Wars, had denounced the picturesque frontier General as a dangerous would be military dictator on the floor of the Senate in 1817 and had demanded his censure by that august body. In later years, the "Harry of the West" was prone to characterize Old

³Nicholas Biddle, The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle dealing with National Affairs, 1807-1844, ed. Reginald McGrane (Boston, 1919), p. 220.

Hickory of Tennessee as an "ignorant, passionate, hypocritical, despotic and tyrannical military chieftain" whose "iron rule" threatened constitutional government.⁴

The heated presidential campaigns of 1824, 1828 and 1832 had produced a veritable spate of broadsides and pamphlets purporting to be "true histories" of the controversial career of Andrew Jackson. One such pamphlet, devoted to a denunciation of Jackson's alleged brutality and inhumanity as exemplified in the bloody execution of six militiamen accused of desertion during the Creek War, concluded with the following appraisal of Jackson's qualifications for high office:

. . . his only delight is in scenes of blood and carnage. Consider the wretchedness brought to many of your fellow citizens by the cruel acts of General Jackson. . . . are you willing and ready to elevate to the presidency General Jackson, an ignorant man uninstructed as to our domestic and foreign policy, uninformed as to our laws, whose only ambition has been to gather laurels as a military chieftain, in the prosecution of which humanity, law and the rights of his fellow citizens have been violated and their blood profusely shed?

Another, published by the pro-Adams National Intelligencer during the 1828 campaign, analyzed Jackson's brief administration as territorial Governor of Florida. Its conclusions were that no tyrant had ever "assumed power so despotic" as the General, that seldom had any ruler issued ordinances "more odious, rapacious, or repressive" and that never had an American official created "so hideous a despotism in the midst of freedom, striking terror into those around him . . . displaying a continued violation of humanity and law." Warning the people of the nation of Jackson's "violent, arbitrary and rapacious disposition," the

⁴Daniel Mallory (ed.), The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay (New York, 1860), I, 421-445; II, 94-105, 145-204, 264-279.

Intelligencer prophesied the end of the Republic, should Jackson attain the presidency. The tyrannical General would doubtless "put a price on the head" of all who dared resist his imperious will, and would inevitably decree "the proscription of all who side with freedom." Other writers had visions of gibbets and guillotines.⁵

Though the gibbets and guillotines failed to materialize, Whig spokesmen nonetheless maintained that the destruction of constitutional government had in fact occurred under the rule of "King Andrew." Calvin Colton, writing in 1846, declared:

The democratic or republican era ended with the retirement of Mr. Adams . . . an alarming regal power was asserted and assumed by General Jackson and has maintained the ascendancy with but little interval. . . .

The historical mission of the opponents of Jackson, in Colton's analysis, was the restoration of constitutional government. Of Henry Clay's political career, he declared: "Mr. Clay's great efforts, since the rise of these dangerous pretensions, have been directed to limit, restrict and restrain them, for the purpose of re-establishing the democratic power of the Constitution." To Colton, the party battle between Democrats and Whigs was grounded in a single, overwhelming issue: "the struggle between the democratic and regal interpretation of the Constitution." The Democrats he deemed unworthy of their party's name. The

⁵A Dialogue between a Colonel of the Militia and a Militiaman in relation to the Rights of Militiamen and the Execution of Six Militiamen shot by Order of General Jackson (n. p., 1824); "Henry," An Examination of the Civil Administration of General Jackson in Florida (Washington, 1828); James L. Armstrong, General Jackson's Juvenile Indiscretions (Washington, D. C., 1832); "Curtius," Torch Light--An Examination of the Opposition to the Administration (Washington, 1826); C. A. Davis, Life of Andrew Jackson by Major Jack Downing of the Downingville Militia (Philadelphia, 1834). The best single source for personal vituperation against Jackson is Truth's Advocate and Monthly Anti-Jackson Expositor (Cincinnati, 1828). This monthly magazine, edited by Adams partisans in Ohio who carefully collected defamation from all

Jacksonians were believers, not in democracy, but in naked despotism. Only the party of Henry Clay remained faithful to the principles of Jefferson and Madison. "The question," Colton concluded, "is the old question, whether we should have in this country a power--tyrannical, absolute, the exercise of which must sooner or later produce an absolute despotism--or a free, representative government, with the powers clearly defined and clearly separated." To Colton, Jackson and his followers stood for the former, while Clay and the Whig party defended the latter. "King Andrew," a malicious wilful despot, had sought the destruction of American liberty. "Servility was the homage he demanded; acquiescence was not enough." His political heirs, Colton argued, had continued his evil, destructive work.⁶

Whigs found justification for these charges in Jackson's conduct of the presidential office. Old Hickory's use of the veto power and his firm determination to control the executive branch of government were deemed by Whig spokesmen subversive of true constitutional government. The National Intelligencer declared on the occasion of Jackson's veto of the Maysville Road Bill, that, inasmuch as there was little doubt of the constitutionality of the act, Jackson's use of the veto power was most improper. The veto, the Intelligencer warned, was a most "delicate power."

over the union, was devoted exclusively to proving Jackson a barbaric fanatic "dangerous to the liberties of his country."

⁶Calvin Colton, The Life and Times of Henry Clay (New York, 1846), I, 503-504; II, 21.

In the British monarchy, where it is absolute, there has been no attempt to exercise it, we believe, for many years. Indeed, by disuse it may be said to have become obsolete. If considered as a power which may be ordinarily exercised in this government, the first question hereafter will be, in reference to any proposed act of legislation, What does the President say? When we come to this (and we seem to be approaching it) our government will indeed have become . . . an ELECTIVE DESPOTISM!

Henry Clay, demanding that Congress override the veto of the Bank Recharter Bill, declared that:

The veto is hardly reconcilable with the genius of representative government. It is totally irreconcilable with it if it is to be frequently employed in respect to the expediency of measures as well as their constitutionality. It is a feature borrowed from a prerogative of the British king. And it is remarkable that in England it has grown obsolete, not having been used for upward of a century.

Clay found Jackson's claims that Congress should have consulted him prior to the passage of the Bank Bill most alarming: "Must all legislation," he cried, "in its commencement and termination concentrate in the President? When we shall have reached that state of things, the election and annual sessions of Congress will be a useless charge upon the people, and the whole business of government may be economically conducted by ukases and decrees." The acceptance of the Jacksonian view of the executive prerogative, Clay warned, would mean the destruction of liberty and representative government in America.⁷

The Kentucky Senator frequently invoked the spectre of incipient despotism in warning the nation against the dangers of Jacksonian rule. When Jackson, in defiance of the expressed will of Congress, ordered the removal of government deposits from the Bank of the United States, Clay proclaimed:

⁷National Intelligencer, June 24, 1830; U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 59-94; "Junius" [Calvin Colton], The Life of Henry Clay (New York, 1844), p. 6.

We are in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly tending toward a total change of the pure Republican character of our government, and to the concentration of all political power in the hands of one man. The powers of Congress are paralyzed, except when exerted in conformity to his will, by the frequent and extraordinary use of the Executive veto, not anticipated by the founders of the Constitution and not practiced by any of the predecessors of the present chief magistrate. . . . By the 3rd of March, 1837, if the progress of innovation continues, there will be scarcely a vestige remaining of the government and its policy as they existed prior to the 3rd of March, 1820. In a term of eight years, a little more than equal to that which was required to establish our liberties, the government will have been transformed into an elective monarchy--the worst of all forms of government. . . . The time has come to when we must decide whether the Constitution, the laws and the checks which they have respectively provided, shall prevail, or the will of one man shall have uncontrolled sway.⁸

In their choice of their party name, the Whigs sought to identify the Jacksonians with the Tory despotism of the hated tyrant, George III, and to claim for themselves the mantle of the Whig patriots of the Revolution. In their appeal to history, they sought also to employ the Jacksonian device of identifying the opposition with the discredited Federalist tradition. Calvin Colton, in one of his "Junius Tracts," quoted Clay as declaring:

All the former grounds of difference which distinguished the Federal party, and were the subjects of contention between them and the Republicans, have ceased, from the lapse of time and change of circumstances, except one, and that is the maintenance and increase of executive power. This was the leading policy of the Federal party. A strong, powerful and energetic executive was its favorite tenet. I tell the gentleman, John C. Calhoun, at this time a reconverted Democrat, that he will find the true old democratic party, who were for resisting the encroachments of power and limiting Executive patronage, on this side of the Senate, and not with his new allies, who do not hold a solitary principle in common with the Republican party of 1798. IT IS THE OLD FEDERAL PARTY WITH WHOM HE IS NOW ACTING.

⁸U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 23d Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 59-94.

One Whig journal, in its eagerness to establish the Jeffersonian purity of the party, fabricated an address, purporting to be signed by twenty-eight leading Jacksonian Democrats which stated that the signers, all former Federalists, had captured control of the Democratic party of Jackson and proposed to use their power to advance the objectives of Hamiltonian Federalism. Whenever possible, the Whig spokesmen endeavored to fasten the scare word "Federalist" upon their opposition, while claiming for themselves the mantle of Jefferson. In Pennsylvania, a gathering of the party resolved "that we recognize the Democratic doctrines of 1798 and the Democratic Whig principles of 1834, as the resuscitated Whig doctrines of 1776 having for their object the fixing of the boundaries of the various departments of the government and the deliverance of the people from the usurpations of Royal and Federal power." Similar resolutions were adopted by Whig groups throughout the nation.⁹

In their justification of their historical role, anti-Jacksonian publicists were also fond of appeals to classical antiquity. Clay, in his speech on the removal of the deposits, likened Jackson to the tyrant Julius Caesar, who seized the treasury of Rome from the Tribune Melletus. The anti-Jacksonian Alexandria Gazette editorialized: "Not the glory of Caesar but the welfare of Rome." Joseph Story mused: "I seem almost, when I write, to be in a dream, and to be called back to the last days of the Roman Republic, when the people shouted for Caesar, and liberty itself expired with the dark but prophetic words of Cicero."

⁹Junius "[Calvin Colton], Henry Clay, p. 3; North American, November 11, 1846; Daily Telegraph, January 21, 30, February 20, March 12, July 2, 1840; United States Gazette, June 20, 1840; National Gazette, January 20, 30, July 4, September 1, 1840; Boston Daily Atlas, January 1, 1833; Pennsylvania Intelligencer, April 24, June 12, 1834.

Other Whigs were more catholic in their historical allusions. Senator Leigh exclaimed to the Senate in a denunciation of Jackson: "He has a presumption which no mortal man has ever before been cursed with, which no monarch since the days of Henry VIII ever claimed before. . . ." And there were some Whigs who preferred to compare the Jacksonians to the Jacobins of revolutionary France. The National Intelligencer declared their Republicanism to be of the blood-thirsty variety espoused by "Danton, Marat and Robespierre." Nicholas Biddle, wrote Henry Clay, upon reading Jackson's Bank Veto message: "It is really a manifesto of anarchy such as Marat or Robespierre might have issued to the mob of the Faubourg St. Antoine."¹⁰

In Whig protest, "Jacksonian despotism" played the same key role occupied by "aristocracy" in Jacksonian rhetoric. Whigs fervently proclaimed the existence of a dastardly threat to Republican government, affirmed their kinship with champions of liberty throughout the course of history, and damned their opposition as the precursors of tyranny. They prophesied the end of the Republic should their cause not be sustained by the people. Thus Clay declared that under Jacksonian rule: "We behold the usual incidents of approaching tyranny. The land is filled with spies and informers, and detraction and denunciation are the orders of the day. People, especially incumbents in their place, no longer dare to speak in tones of manly freedom, but in cautious whispers of trembling slaves. The premonitory symptoms of despotism are upon us; and, if Congress does not apply an instantaneous

¹⁰ Alexandria Gazette, quoted in the National Intelligencer, April 15, 1831; National Intelligencer, August 5, 1830; Henry Clay, Private Correspondence (New York, 1855), p. 341; W. W. Story, Life and Letters of Joseph Story (Boston, 1851), II, 154.

and effective remedy the fatal collapse will soon come on, and we shall die, ignobly die! base, mean, and abject slaves--the scorn and contempt of mankind--unpitied, unwept and unmourned." Clay was by no means alone in his verbal professions of deep apprehension. Harriet Martineau, visiting the United States in 1834, reported: "The first gentleman who greeted me on my arrival in the United States, a few minutes after I had landed, informed me without delay that I had arrived at an unhappy crisis, that the institutions of the country would be in ruins before my return to England; that the leveling spirit was desolating society; and that the United States was on the verge of a military despotism."¹¹

Whig publicists experienced no little difficulty, however, in persuading the people to take seriously their charges that Andrew Jackson was a potential despot whose power imperiled the safety of the Republic. Finding Jackson's motives beyond challenge in the minds of most of their countrymen, Whig journalists then sought to arouse popular hatred against Old Hickory's circle of intimate advisers. Hinting darkly of the sinister activities of the mysterious "Kitchen Cabinet," Whig publicists sought to create the impression that the heroic Old General was the captive of a group of unscrupulous political adventurers bent upon the plundering of the nation. The Jacksonian image in Whig protest was an ambiguous one; in some versions Jackson appears as the forceful, conquering military despot whose imperious will overawed a nation and threatened the Republic; in others, he becomes a benign, well meaning, credulous Old Hero seduced by crafty, disreputable, fawning

¹¹U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 23d Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 59-94; Harriet Martineau, Society in America (New York, 1834), I, 8.

politicos. Of the two images, the latter proved the more effective in swaying the popular mind. The National Intelligencer in 1830 reported that the following toast was offered by an obscure Virginia gentleman at the celebration of the Fourth of July at Harper's Ferry: "I am for Hickory, providing his corrupting worms are removed before they render him unfit for use." Whig politicians, sensing the effectiveness of this approach, redoubled their assaults on the members of the "Kitchen Cabinet" as the decade proceeded. Typical of their vituperation was Virginia Senator Henry A. Wise's characterization of Amos Kendall as Andrew Jackson's "thinking machine, and his writing machine--ay, and his lying machine," the "diabolical genius" of the Jackson administration.¹²

Jackson's retirement from public life afforded the Whig opposition opportunity to borrow another Jacksonian tactic and turn it against its inventors. From the outset, opposition spokesmen had charged the Jacksonians with Federalism. The emergence of Martin Van Buren as leader of the Democratic party provided the opportunity to charge them with the taint of "aristocracy" as well. In 1835 Davy Crockett, Whig "Coonskin Congressman" from Tennessee, lent his name to a scurrilous biography of Van Buren which charged the New York political leader with aristocratic contempt for the common man. Van Buren, it was charged, had thoroughly scorned "all his old friends and companions in the humbler walks of life" and strutting and swaggering "like a crow in a gutter," cultivated and dandified and effeminate pretensions of a British aristocrat. After lengthy commentary on Van Buren's decadent mode of life, including his fondness for imported

¹²National Intelligencer, June 26, 1830; U.S., Congress, Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3d Sess., p. 386.

English coaches and liveried servants, Crockett informed the plain Republican citizens of the land that Jackson's heir-apparent went about "laced up in corsets, such as the women of the town wear, and if possible, tighter than the best of them."¹³

The line of political argument begun by Crockett prior to the campaign of 1836 reached fantastic proportions in the campaign of 1840. Van Buren was charged with every conceivable form of aristocratic decadence by Whig journalists and orators. "Sweet Sandy Whiskers"--as Whig journalists dubbed Van Buren--was said to have spent untold thousands of the tax payers' money that the "Presidential Palace" might be furnished "as splendidly as that of the Caesars, and as richly adorned as the proudest Asiatic mansion." While the workmen for whom Van Buren hypocritically feigned concern "almost perished for lack of bread," screamed one Whig Congressman, "Van Buren dined from massive gold plates and French sterling silver services" and imported French cooks to prepare his regal repasts. He furthermore furnished the White House with enormous mirrors, that he might preen himself handsomely while mounted on a blooded white charger. "What," sneered the Congressmen, would his constituents think, could they but behold this "democratic peacock, in full court costume, strutting by the hour before the golden framed mirrors, nine feet high and four and one half feet wide." As final evidence of Van Buren's decadence, it was reported that the shameless fop had even furnished the White House with a bathtub.

¹³David Crockett, The Life of Martin Van Buren (Philadelphia, 1835), pp. 80-81. The Crockett biography was actually written by Congressman A. S. Clayton of Georgia. See J. D. Wade, "The Authorship of David Crockett's Autobiography," Georgia Historical Quarterly, VI (September, 1922), 265-268.

Meanwhile, others denounced Van Buren "not only as a graceless aristocrat and a dandy, but a cunning conspirator seeking the overthrow of his country's liberties."¹⁴

By 1840, the Whigs were laying claim to sole custody of all the virtues of that republican purity and agrarian simplicity once associated with Old Hickory. The quip of a Jacksonian journalist who had sneered that General William Henry Harrison, the Whig version of the Frontier Hero, would be quite happy to pass his last days sipping hard cider in a log cabin at public expense, provided the opposition with their golden opportunity. In an orgy of cider sipping and log cabin building, the Whigs conducted a roaring campaign designed to establish their cause as that of the common man versus the decadent aristocrat. Joyously Whigs screamed that Van Buren sipped champagne out of a silver goblet, while their Hero shared the tippie of the common man. While Whig journalists cried that Van Buren aspired to become MARTIN THE FIRST, KING OF NORTH AMERICA, Whig paraders chanted:

Old Tip he wears a homespun coat
He has no ruffled shirt-wirt-wirt.
But Kat he has the golden plate
And he's a little squirt-wirt-wirt.

Taking to song, Whigs proceeded to serenade their worried opposition with ballads proclaiming Tip's Democracy and Van's Aristocracy.

¹⁴Charles Ogle, The Regal Splendor of the President's Palace (Boston, 1840); Pretended Democracy of Martin Van Buren (Boston, 1840); G. W. Julian, Political Recollections 1840-1871 (Chicago, 1884), I, 11. An excellent study of the campaign of 1840 is provided in Robert Gray Gunderson, The Log Cabin Campaign (Lexington, 1957).

Let Van from his coolers of silver drink wine,
And lounge on a cushioned settee,
Our man on a buckeye bench can recline,
Content with hard cider is he.

We've tried your purse proud lords,
Who love in palaces to shine.
But we'll have a ploughman
President of the Cincinnati line.

In the campaign of 1840, the Whigs discovered a great affinity for the common man. Whig journals vied with their Jacksonian counterparts in celebrating the intuitive and infallible wisdom of the people. Webster went that it had not been his good fortune to have been born in a log cabin, boasted of the log cabin origins of his family, and righteously threatened to thrash anyone who called him an aristocrat. The fastidious Philip Hone of New York and the aristocratic Hugh Swinton Legare of South Carolina took to the stump and harangued sweating multitudes across the nation.¹⁵

Whig enthusiasm for mass democracy was in part the product of conviction, in part sheer opportunism. There were within the Whig ranks many who felt the deepest misgivings over the rule of King Numbers. Their private statements would have given full justification to many of the Jacksonian accusations of Whig hostility to popular rule. Thus, one Massachusetts Whig leader declared to Nathan Appleton: "I think that our experiment of self-government approaches to a total failure," while another Whig partisan told the visiting British phrenologist George Combe that military despotism would be preferable to majority rule. "Others, more moderate," Combe added, "inform me that they would prefer a government like that of the British in Canada in preference to

¹⁵A. R. Norton, Tippecanoe Songs of the Log Cabin Boys and Girls of 1840 (Lit. Vernon, Ohio, 1883); Gunderson, pp. 123-134.

their own democracy." Chancellor Kent deplored the ascendancy of the "democracy of numbers" and declared that the "horrible doctrine and influence of Jacksonism" could but culminate in the destruction of the Republic. A correspondent told Whig Congressman Willie Magnum that no good could come of the rule "of the ignorance and blind passions of the mob." Philip Hone, oppressed by the rule of a "rascally gang of banditti" wondered: "How long will it be before this liberty of ours becomes so licentious that we shall be compelled to take refuge in the arms of despotism?" Thurlow Weed, years later, confided in his autobiography that throughout his life he feared "that universal suffrage would occasion universal political demoralization and ultimately overthrow our government." Many Whigs filled their private correspondence with distaste for the great unwashed masses of the nation and the political power they wielded.¹⁶

But sensing the temper of the times, astute Whig leaders managed to keep these dissidents quiet as they, in the name of the party, sang the people's praises and condemned the Jacksonians' contempt for the popular will. Thus, Calvin Colton, author of numerous pamphlets proclaiming the Whigs the true champions of popular rule, published his true views of the political situation in an anonymous volume printed in London. In that intriguing study, he argued that the party battle in America was waged between those who sought to drag the nation "towards the lower level of democracy" and those who fought for

¹⁶George Combe, Notes on the United States of North America (Philadelphia, 1841), I, 194; Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, ed. Bayard Tuckerman (New York, 1888), II, 20, 215; Thurlow Weed, Autobiography (Boston, 1883), p. 90; J. H. Horton, James Kent: A Study in Conservatism (New York, 1939), p. 318n; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, 1945), p. 267.

"spiritual supremacy." Anticipating later interpreters, Colton explained the Constitution as a document designed to check and restrict the growth of democracy, framed by men who knew and feared "the tendency of the popular mind towards democracy and who sought to arrest the downward process." But so far had the nation gone on that downward road, that all parties in America, whether conservative or radical, Colton explained, had to pay verbal homage to the democratic principle. The leaders of the opposition to Jacksonism, Colton assured his readers, were quite "aware of the apostasy" from sound constitutional conservatism in the actual government of the country. However, he concluded, "the delicate position of the most elevated statesmen, on whom devolves the greatest responsibility, may suggest caution, and impose silence on their lips, not allowing them to utter all that they fear."¹⁷

On occasion, individual Whig partisans were unable to observe that discreet silence Colton found essential to the success of their cause. The ultra-conservative Boston Courier, ridiculing the Jacksonian belief in the political wisdom of the common people of the land, observed in 1834: "A farmer never looks so well as when he has a hand upon the plough. With his huge paw upon the statutes, what can he do? It is as proper for a blacksmith to attempt to repair watches, as a farmer to legislate." Robert Walsh's American Quarterly Review went so far as to question the wisdom of universal suffrage, arguing that the ignorant, the vicious and the propertyless contributed nothing wholesome to the nation's political life. The aged Noah Webster, a former Federalist now staunchly pro-Whig, published an open letter to Daniel Webster arguing

¹⁷"An American Gentleman" [Calvin Colton], A Voice from America to England (London, 1839), p. 220.

that since the "great mass of people are and always must be very incompetent judges" the safety of the nation could be guaranteed only if the choice of president were taken from their hands and vested in a propertied elite. Charles King's New York American and Walsh's National Gazette not only assailed the rule of "King Numbers" at home, but were most critical of democratic movements abroad.¹⁸

However, as even the rabidly Jacksonian Democratic Review conceded, Whig papers critical of majoritarian democracy were in the minority. Usually, Whig editors such as Greeley, Seward and Niles joined with their democratic counterparts in praise of the principle of majority rule. Though many members of the Whig party had their private misgivings, most were reluctant to make their fears public. And a large percentage of the party's leadership, perhaps even a majority, was as firmly devoted to the principles of popular rule as the opposition. A reading of the sources of the period does not leave one with the impression that the question of the rule of the people was a matter of burning controversy during the Jacksonian years. Men of both parties paid it lip service at the very least.¹⁹

The presence within the ranks of those who would not make the necessary avowal of faith was a source of no little discomfort to Whig strategists, however. The perverse insistence of journalists like King or Walsh in condemning the rule of King Numbers not only provided grist for the Jacksonian propaganda mill, it occasioned insomnia for the

¹⁸Boston Courier, June 28, 1834; Noah Webster, Letter to the Hon. Daniel Webster on the Political Affairs of the United States (Philadelphia, 1837); American Quarterly Review, II (November, 1845), 446-448; V (July, 1846), 29; V (November, 1846), 442.

¹⁹United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (January, 1838), 220.

leaders of the Whig party, dependent as they were on the judgment of numbers for sustenance. The identification of many of the prominent leaders of the party, in the popular mind, with aristocracy and Federalism provided further cause for discomfort. Clay, despite his Jeffersonian background, was tarred by the "corrupt bargain" allegation. Webster's former Federalist affiliations could hardly be covered by recourse to coonskin caps, log cabins and hard cider. The Boston Atlas expressed these anxieties when, late in 1838, an editorial in its pages regretted that there existed in the Whig party a "minority faction" not in sympathy with "the democratic principles of our government." Though piously disavowing any intention of saying anything "in derogation of the honesty or patriotism of this portion of the Whig party," the Atlas did proclaim "the aristocratical minority disqualified to . . . act as the successful leaders of any national party." The Atlas explained: "For any party in the United States to be permanently successful, it is necessary that the leaders of it should not only profess but should feel, the principles of democracy." The editor recommended that henceforth, party leaders should give satisfactory evidence ,

that they sympathize, in their hearts, with the spirit of popular institutions . . . those who undertake to be leaders, and are at the same time destitute of that sympathy, or entertain a secret sympathy of an opposite character, will be sure to lead to nothing but disappointment and defeat. They may be honest, and they may be able, but they are not the men for whom the crisis calls. They are the men of yesterday, their hearts are in the coffin with Caesar's, and what this crisis calls for, is the men of today, men whose hearts beat high in sympathy for the institutions of their country, and with the feelings of their countrymen, men not obstinately wedded to the past.

The Atlas concluded by demanding that new leadership, firmly devoted to such principles, should be called forth to take command of the destinies

of the party. The powers within the Whig alliance, recognizing the cold logic of the situation, soon obliged and found a new standard bearer for 1840.²⁰

It is thus understandable that Whig political protest is quite devoid of the sort of considered critique of majoritarian democracy to be found in Federalist writings. Though privately sometimes skeptical of the political wisdom of the "great unwashed," the spokesmen of Whiggery found it expedient to remain publically silent on these matters. Indeed, the Whig strategy was to assail the Jacksonians for their alleged contempt of the popular will, as evidenced in Andrew Jackson's veto of the wishes of the people's representatives in Congress and Martin Van Buren's "arrogant disdain" for republican simplicity.

Whig spokesmen were most unwilling, however, to carry their enthusiasm (real or feigned) for democracy to the Jacksonian extreme of demanding popular control of the judiciary. The Jacksonian doctrine that the President, as representative of the people, possessed equal power with the Supreme Court, in the interpretation of the Constitution, was denounced by opposition papers as an arrogant defiance of the constitutional document. The independence of the judiciary from popular removal or presidential power was praised by Webster as the "corner stone" of liberty. His judgment was repeated with approbation in the anti-Jacksonian press. Nor did the Jacksonian criticism of the common law and their demands for the removal of judicial abuses receive much support from the opposition. Though a few Whigs joined the reformers, most remained either hostile or indifferent. Thus, the National

²⁰Boston Atlas, November 21, 1838.

Intelligencer praised the courts as guardians of the nation against the destructive radicalism of "the momentary whims of a majority."²¹

The spoils system, or--as they termed it, rotation in office--had been regarded by Jacksonian spokesmen as a necessary guarantee of majority rule from the incursions of an "aristocratic bureaucracy." The opposition, though quite willing to practice spoils politics when the opportunity presented itself, loudly condemned this innovation for "demoralizing" and "debauching" the public service. A Whig pamphleteer explained that before the ascension of Jackson to the presidency, "office was considered as a public commission created for the service of the people, as the state itself was created for their benefit. The emoluments of office were not held to be the objects of its creation . . . change in office was deemed a misfortune." But with the coming of Jackson, office ceased to be a public service, and became an object of political plunder. Rotation in office had "awakened the cupidity of all the idle and ambitious of the land, to turn them from every consideration of patriotism in the formation of party attachments." The author deplored the "Jacksonian notion" that held "that all men are qualified for all offices and decries the value of experience, faithfulness and skill." Whig journals agreed that the practical effect of this "pernicious idea" was the lowering of the tone of the public service. The National Intelligencer declared that since the beginning of Old Hickory's "reign," "men have juttet up into public station to which they would no more have aspired in the days of Washington than

²¹National Intelligencer, January 3, 1831; Niles Register, December 31, 1831.

they would have attempted to subvert the order of nature."²²

The sufferings of those displaced in Jackson's "clean sweep" were portrayed in lurid detail in the Whig press. Alexander Everett, writing for a Boston journal, told of the brutal dismissal of several veterans of the Revolutionary War. "At the moment when the gratitude of the nation for the services of the army of the Revolution had led Congress to the adoption of the extraordinary measure of a pension law, several of the veteran survivors of the struggle were rudely thrust by the Executive out of the offices in which the justice of his predecessors had placed them, and left on the confines of the grave to struggle with actual poverty." Everett warned Jackson that he had much to fear from the judgment of history. "Posterity, when they read of the passage of the pension law, and the encomiums upon the character and services of the Revolutionary Patriots that fill the columns of our pamphlets and newspapers, will hardly believe that at the same period the President denounced as a public enemy the venerable survivor of the Tea Party and distributed his Spoils among his own retainers." Searching for comparable atrocities in the annals of history, Everett could think only of the guillotinings of the French Revolution and the brutalities of the Roman emperors: "The lists were made up, and the victims brought to the sacrifice with an indiscriminate ferocity that made no inquiries respecting age, character, connexions, or condition, and would have done honor to the satellites of a Domitian or Nero." With some further exaggeration, he informed his readers: "The number of victims is distinctly indicated by the appalling fact, that within one month

²²The Political Mirror, A Review of Jacksonianism (New York, 1835), pp. 6-7; National Intelligencer, August 5, 1830, August 23, 1835.

after the inauguration of Jackson there were more removals from office than had taken place since the organization of the government." Other Whig editors, bored with statistics, preferred to horrify their readers with tragic tales, such as that of the young clerk who, fearing dismissal, went home one evening and slit his throat from ear to ear.²³

The Whigs thus endeavored to portray themselves as the friends of humanity, decency, and fair play, struggling to save the Republic from the wicked and cynical Jacksonians who sought to debauch the government for their private profit.

To some extent, Whig spokesmen found it possible to use the slave question to strengthen this image. Abolitionist sentiment within Whig ranks was strong enough to enable party spokesmen to get some mileage out of denunciation of the Jacksonian opposition as slave holders and the tools of the slavocracy. On the other hand, the party was striving to form an alliance with the plantation owners of the South, an alliance that could not hold if the party were considered hostile to the "peculiar institution." In 1840, General Harrison condemned slavery North of Mason and Dixon's line, and damned abolitionists in the South. Eventually, this cleavage would help destroy the party.²⁴

On basic economic issues, the Whig party presented not even a semblance of unity. Though the Hamiltonian mercantile elements, both Northern and Southern, were no doubt in a majority in the high councils of the party, the presence within Whig ranks of such inveterate foes of

²³A. H. Everett, The Conduct of the Administration (Boston, 1831), pp. 21-22; National Intelligencer, August 5, 1831.

²⁴The Tennessee Farmer, or, Farmer Jackson in New York (n.p., n.d.); Downing, pp. 228-229; Gunderson, pp. 224-225.

the American System as John C. Calhoun and John Tyler made agreement on such matters as the tariff and internal improvements well nigh impossible. If Daniel Webster had rejoiced at Andrew Jackson's suppression of nullification, there were not a few Southern Whigs who shared the sentiments of John Tyler who found that the Nullification Proclamation had "swent away the barriers of the Constitution and given us in place of the Federal government under which we had fondly believed we were living a military despotism." In the face of such total disagreements on basic governmental philosophy, the Whig party shrewdly refrained from issuing a national platform in 1840.²⁵

In the absence of basic consensus, the Whig spokesmen endeavored to strike a note of essential conservatism which could unite both the slave holding plantation owner, desiring free trade and states rights, and the merchant and manufacturer of the East who desired the implementation of Hamiltonian financial policies. The theme which provided that unity was the spectre of a Jacksonian revolution against property rights. The followers of Old Hickory and Martin Van Buren, it was charged, plotted the subversion of society. The attack on the Bank of the United States was but the first step in the implementation of a sinister plot to incite the poor against the rich and level economic distinctions in society. Alexander Everett declared in horror of the Bank veto message, "for the first time, perhaps, in the history of civilized communities, the Chief Magistrate of a great nation is found appealing to the worst passions of the uninformed part of the people, and endeavoring to stir up the poor against the rich."

²⁵U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 22d Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 260-377; Pichmond Whig, December 14, 21, 1832.

The Portland Daily Advertiser, warning to this theme, editorialized:

. . . we ask the property holders, if they are willing to lend a hand to some new Agrarian project which shall upset all the rights of property, and establish an equal division of estates and chattels. A more deranging, radical, law upsetting document was never promulgated by the wildest Roman fanatic. . . . Is the President preparing for a crown by cajoling us with the prospect of a equal division of goods--by offering his aid to overturn the rights of property, to humble the wealthy, and to put down the exalted?

Daniel Webster cried that Jackson's message "manifestly seeks to inflame the poor against the rich; it wantonly attacks whole classes of people, for the purpose of turning against them the prejudices and resentments of other classes. It is a state paper which finds no topic too exciting for its use, no passion too inflammable for its address and solicitation." Webster expressed his fear that "at the very moment of almost unparalleled general prosperity, there appears an unaccountable disposition to destroy the most useful and most approved institutions of our government." He hinted darkly that civilized society might not survive Jacksonian rule.²⁶

Horace Greeley in 1840 explained the grave dangers to society inherent in the Jacksonian appeal when he wrote in the Log Cabin:

Teach the poor man to believe the rich are his natural enemies--that they rob him of his just earnings and drive him from his proper place in society, and you teach him not merely to be adverse to labor, envious, discontented and malignant, but you instigate him also, to reclaim what has been unjustly wrested from him. . . . Teach him that the rich have engrossed unequal and unjust privileges and monopolies, which grind him to the earth, and you bid him, if he has the spirit of a man, to rise and assert his rights--if need be, by the saber and the bayonet.

²⁶Everett, pp. 74-75; Portland Daily Advertiser, quoted in the National Intelligencer, August 9, 1832; U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 22d Cong., 1st Sess., p. 1240.

Edward Everett, seeking campaign contributions, laid it on the line, writing to a confidential correspondent: "If our friends in Boston mean that their houses, their lands, their stocks shall really be theirs much longer, they must make the effort, they must make it at once. It is but \$1,000 each for one hundred gentlemen." Whig publicists took up the refrain. Calvin Colton accused President Van Buren of secretly and malignantly harboring "the settled purpose of revolution." Samuel Gridley Howe, dwelling on the horrors of foreign radicalisms, concluded by declaring "Jacksonism and radicalism amount . . . to the same thing; it is only in the names, that there is any difference."²⁷

In 1849, the American Whig Review, seeking to recapture the Southern support that had left the Whig ranks with John C. Calhoun and John Tyler, sought to convince Southern conservatives that the American System held not half the perils to their "peculiar institution" harbored by Jacksonian radicalism. Pointing to the growing abolitionist sentiment in the ranks of the Northern Democracy in the last years of the decade, the editor informed the planter-slave holding elements of the South that their choice was between the "conservative constitutional Whig," who would protect property rights of all kinds, or "the hot, wild, reckless body that is organizing out of locofoco and abolition elements in the North and West." Seeking to interpret their cause as that of the rights of property versus the destructive leveling

²⁷Log Cabin, August 1, 1840; "Junius" [Calvin Colton], American Jacobinism (New York, 1840); Samuel Gridley Howe, "Radicalism," New England Magazine, VIII (February, 1835), 143; Schlesinger, p. 111.

radicalism of the cohorts of Jackson and Van Buren, the Whigs sought to rally all "men of substance" to their banner.²⁸

The absence of any fixed Jacksonian plan for the eradication of private property did not deter the more intrepid Whig publicists. After perceiving ominous overtones in the Jacksonian attack on the Bank and on special charters of incorporation, they proceeded to hint darkly of the existence of conspiracies yet unknown to the general public. The Boston Atlas, after accusing the Jacksonians of harboring "remorseless and unappeasible hatred of the mercantile classes," charged that the party had fallen under the evil spell of disreputable radicals who harbored "certain metaphysical and mystical dogmas, borrowed apparently from the Jacobins of the French Revolution, according to which, if they can get the power, they propose to reconstruct the existing order of society." A disgruntled office seeker spelled out their foul schemes further in an intriguing book which reported, among other things, that Amos Kendall, the evil genius of the Jacksonian movement, had prepared a secret manuscript "the great principle of which was, that all the burthen of supporting the government and supporting schools, colleges, roads, internal improvements, city expenses, generally should be laid upon those, and those only, who had property above the value of \$6,000--all above \$6,000 would thus, in time, be razed down to that amount."²⁹

Other publicists of Whiggery, using a strikingly modern tactic,

²⁸American Whig Review, X (August, 1849), 190-194.

²⁹Boston Atlas, July 17, October 26, 1839; Robert Mayo, A Chapter of Sketches on Finance (Baltimore, 1837), pp. 110-111.

preferred name calling. Among their favorite terms for describing the opposition were "Jacobins," "Levelers," "Jack Cades," "Agrarians," "Atheists," "Tanny Wright men," "Locofocos," "infidels," "demagogues," "despots," "Federalists," and "Jesuits." Though their terms of vituperation were on occasion rather contradictory--Jacobins and Federalists have not too much in common--the purpose was the same, to convince their generation that the Jacksonians stood for radical and dangerous change, while the Whig party stood by the American Way. Whig publicists protested incessantly against "innovation in government."

The Whig appeal, however, was by no means limited to the affluent. Whig strategists also sought to win support from the farmers and laborers of the land. Their plea was based on the argument that there was no difference of interest dividing the rich and the poor and that the Jacksonian division of society into "producing" and non-producing" classes was therefore pernicious demagoguery. Daniel Webster denied emphatically ever remarking: "Let Congress take care of the rich, and the rich will take care of the poor." But he did declare on the floor of Congress of the argument that a natural conflict of interest existed between the laborer and the capitalist:

Sir, I admonish the people against the object of outcries like these. I admonish every industrious laborer in the country to be on guard against such delusions. I tell him the attempt to play off passions against his interests, and to prevail on him, in the name of liberty, to destroy all the fruits of liberty, in the name of patriotism, to injure and inflict his country, and, in the name of his own independence, to destroy that very independence and make him a beggar and a slave.

The logic behind Webster's outburst was this: measures which might injure the rich would prove even more injurious to the poor who depended upon the rich for employment. If you would provide for the poor

then, Webster--an inveterate foe of the labor unions of his day--argued, you must first provide for the prosperity of the wealthy, for the economic interests of all classes were intimately intertwined. In his peroration, Webster thundered to the galleries:

whoever has the wickedness to conceive, and the hardihood to avow, a purpose to break down what has been found, in forty years experience, essential to the protection of all interests, by arraying one class against another, and by acting on such a principle as that the poor always hate the rich, shows himself the reckless enemy of all, an enemy to his whole country, to all classes and to every man in it, he deserves to be marked especially with the poor man's curse.³⁰

Calvin Colton, more bluntly warned, "the blow aimed at the moneyed capitalist strikes over on the head of the laborer, and is sure to hurt the latter more than the former." Modifying this theme somewhat, another Whig pamphleteer exclaimed: "Never has an error more pernicious than that of supposing any separation could be practicable between the interests of the rich and the working classes. However selfish might be the disposition of the wealthy, they cannot benefit themselves without serving the laborer." The New York Merchants Committee, reflecting on this truth, added significantly: "In a great majority of cases the possession of wealth is the proof of merit." To agitate against the wealthy, then, was to agitate against the virtuous.³¹

Whigs also argued that in a land of opportunity, the class antagonisms of Europe had no place. Any man of merit could acquire

³⁰U.S., Congress, Register of Debates, 23d Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 439-442.

³¹"Junius" [Calvin Colton], Labor and Capital (New York, 1840), p. 14; Robert Hare, Suggestions respecting the Reformation of the Banking System (Philadelphia, 1837), pp. 28-29; Plaindealer, May 13, 1837.

wealth; why then should the poor resent the success of the worthy? Daniel Webster was willing to concede that in the Old World there existed a "clear and well defined line, between capital and labor," but he denied categorically that in a country where any man could, through enterprise and frugality, rise to the top, any such "visible and broad distinction" could be admitted. The Boston Palladium editorialized: "The high places, and public consideration, will belong to the enterprising--but the trial is open to all, and if those who have them not are dissatisfied that others have higher seats, let them use the same industry, patience and zeal, and come to the top." The Whig industrialist Abbot Lawrence, in an appearance before the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, toasted "the leveling system--as taught among us--viz., to qualify the whole community for the upper level."³²

Other Whig spokesmen maintained that the capitalist was much a laborer as the mechanic, that all who toiled were united by a common bond of interest and that the Jacksonian distinctions between bankers and farmers, speculators and artisans therefore were highly invidious. Thus, Edward Everett declared before a Boston labor organization: "The working man's party comprehends all those by whom the work of the community is really done: all those who by any kind of honest industry employ the talents which the creator has given them." Calvin Colton, in embellishing this theme, wrote: "Every American laborer can stand up proudly and say, I AM THE AMERICAN CAPITALIST, which is not a

³²U.S., Congress, Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2d Sess., appendix, p. 663; Boston Palladium, quoted in the New York Sentinel, March 6, 1830; National Intelligencer, October 14, 1830.

metaphor but literal truth."³³

One partisan of Whiggery, Daniel B. Barnard, defended capitalism from "the aspersions of radicalism" by declaring its purpose to be to "distribute and equalize" property, "as far as may be without interfering with individual right, and the due encouragement of individual exertion." He declared that there was "no instrumentality more efficient for both objects, than our private corporations." Far from constituting a conspiracy to exploit the true producing classes, as some Jacksonians would have it, Whigs often argued that chartered corporations were but devices devised to assure a broader distribution of wealth. By opening up investment opportunities to the man of moderate circumstances, and protecting his property from total confiscation in the event of business failure through limited liability, the corporation made possible the fulfillment of the American dream. Daniel Webster, in tracing the effect of corporate organization on the distribution of property, found that not only did the corporation make possible an increase in wealth, but it helped to "equalize it, to diffuse it, to scatter its advantages among the many, and to give content, cheerfulness, and animation to all classes of the social system."³⁴

In the place of the harsh picture of class conflict between the producing and non-producing classes of society drawn by the more radical Jacksonian partisans, the spokesmen of Whiggery postulated the

³³National Intelligencer, December 4, 1830; Junius [Calvin Colton] Labor and Capital, p. 11.

³⁴Daniel L. Barnard, Speeches and Reports in the Assembly of New York at the Annual Session of 1838 (Albany, 1838), pp. 48, 77; Daniel Webster, Writings and Speeches (Boston, 1903), XIII, 72-76.

existence of a harmonious, beneficent economic order characterized by the helpful interdependence of all classes. Arguing that agitation against the wealthy could but lead to the disruption of the economic order and the victimization of the poor, they cast themselves in the role of true defenders of the working classes against the destructive schemes of irresponsible demagogues. Asserting that in America any man could become a capitalist, they decried appeals to class prejudice. Defending the emerging capitalist society of investment, corporate expansion and far flung enterprise, they held that all would share in its largess.³⁵

Inasmuch as the Jacksonian opposition included both ardent protectionists and free traders, Whig spokesmen attempted to follow a circumspect course with regard to the tariff. In localities where it was found politically profitable--the West, New England and Pennsylvania--protectionists' policies were defended as essential to guarantee economic progress and a high wage level. Workingmen were told that without the tariff, foreign competition would drive American entrepreneurs to slash wages to the subsistence level in order to survive. In the South, however, strong elements within the Whig coalition opposed tariff legislation, and, in Jacksonian terms, denounced protectionism

³⁵Additional examples of the Whig belief in the doctrine of the unity of interests of all classes may be found in the following: D. D. Barnard, The Social System (Hartford, 1848); Plea for Social and Popular Repose (New York, 1845); "Junius" [Calvin Colton], The Rights of Labor (New York, 1847); Edward Everett, Lectures on the Working Man's Party (Boston, 1853); T. F. Gordon, The War on the Bank of the United States (Philadelphia, 1834); Thomas F. Hunt, The Book of Wealth (New York, 1839); Locofocoism; as displayed in the Boston Magazine against Schools and Ministers and in favor of robbing Children of the Property of Their Parents (Albany, 1840); Alonzo Potter, Political Economy: Its Objects, Uses and Principles (New York, 1841); Facts for the Laboring Man (Newport, R. I., 1840).

as an economic conspiracy against their interests. Torn by this conflict, national Whig spokesmen either evaded the issue altogether, or announced their support of a "moderate and judicious tariff."

The National Republicans had been more outspoken on this matter, and had defended the entire American System as essential to the prosperity of the nation. Portraying themselves as the enlightened advocates of economic progress, of a prosperity beneficent to all social classes, they charged the followers of Old Hickory with narrow prejudices and unwise notions which, if implemented, would lead to financial stagnation and distress for all groups in America. A small town editor in the summer of 1830 had taken to verse to deplore that lack of faith which served to . . .

Cause those who look on gold as filth
Who think it mars our lasting wealth
To cry like mighty lions bray
Adown! Adown with Henry Clay!

Cause those who seek a humble lot
A leaky and unfurnished cot
Who worship not a golden fay
To be the enemies of Henry Clay.

Cause those who wear a tattered rag
Have no vehicle but a bag,
Nor roads but those the beasts survey
To rouse and rout this Henry Clay.

He'd make us roads and make machines
To doubly multiply our means
And turn our labors into play
So base the schemes of Henry Clay. . . .

The writer of this bit of political doggerel concluded by despairing of the nation's future, should Clay's great System go unappreciated.³⁶

The Panic of 1837 enabled the Whig opposition to charge that the

³⁶St. Clairsville Historian (Ohio), quoted in the National Intelligencer, July 26, 1830.

course of events had justified this analysis. Hard times were blamed on Democratic financial blunderings. New leadership would restore prosperity. In 1840, the slogan was, "Hatty's policy: Fifty cents a day and French soup--our policy: Two dollars a day and roast beef."³⁷

The Whigs of 1840 were, however, by no means candid as to just exactly what new measures they would inaugurate for the restoration of prosperity. Not only did they equivocate on the tariff, but on the vital question of the chartering of a new national bank, they denied any intention of taking such action. Indeed, not only had the unpopularity of Nicholas Biddle's institution made this issue highly dangerous to the foes of Jackson, but within Whig ranks there was no consensus on basic banking policies.

Earlier, opposition spokesmen had offered reasoned defense of the need for a nationally chartered banking institution. The Bank was needed, it was argued, in order to provide some measure of control over the excessive note issue of the state banks. Eliminate the Bank, Biddle's defenders prophesied, and the nation would be overrun once again with worthless and inflated rag money issues. Far from promoting speculation, the Bank had provided positive checks against over-extension of credit. Albert Gallatin had praised the Bank of the United States for "securing with certainty" a sound currency. By its use of the government deposits of the notes of the state banks, the Bank had been enabled, through promptly presenting such notes for redemption, to "effectually check excessive issues." Its elimination would remove this salutary check, lead to banking irresponsibility and

³⁷Gunderson, pp. 11-28.

to currency instability. The Bank was therefore essential to the economic well-being of the nation. All classes would suffer from its elimination.³⁸

The opposition to Jackson had also charged that the Democrats, by eliminating the Bank of the United States, hoped to pave the way for the creation of a new "monied monster" controlled by their own partisans and manipulated for political ends. In this scheme they perceived a grave danger to American liberties and cried of the nefarious Jacksonian conspiracy to effect an "alliance between the purse and the sword." Most opposed any governmentally dominated or controlled bank as both unsound economically and unsafe politically. Daniel Webster had even been moved to object to the presence on the board of the second Bank of the United States of directors appointed by the President. Arguing for a complete separation of government and banking, Webster declared: "The credit of banks has generally been in proportion to their independence of government . . . in other countries such connection between government and banking institutions has produced nothing but evil." Though Webster and his followers were in favor of a national bank capable of exerting some degree of control over the currency, they were most decidedly opposed to such control in the hands of a public agency. The task, they argued, should be left in the trust of a private corporation. Some, like Nathan Appleton, called for a greater degree of

³⁸Albert Gallatin, The Writings of Albert Gallatin, ed. Henry Adams (Philadelphia, 1879), III, 333-335; "Considerations on the Currency and Banking System of the United States," American Quarterly Review, VIII (1830), 441-523; William Beach Lawrence, "Bank of the United States," North American Review, XXXIII (1831), 524-563; Illinois Gazette, quoted in the National Intelligencer, April 5, 1831; Pennsylvania Enquirer, quoted in the National Intelligencer, March 25, 1831; National Intelligencer, August 31, 1831; U.S., Congress, House Report, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., No. 358; U.S. Congress, Senate Document, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., No. 104.

public supervision than had been provided by the charter of the second Bank of the United States. Some, like Webster, wanted even less.³⁹

The efforts of the Van Buren administration to divorce banking and governmental finance through the creation of the Independent Sub-Treasury, elicited general condemnation from Whig spokesmen and from conservative Democrats. The main objection centered in the charge that this represented a dangerous alliance of the "purse and the sword," in that the Executive would be given full control of the federal finances. Some added, significantly, that the power of private banks to expand their credit was severely restricted by the Sub-Treasury measure. Whig propagandists seeking to win mass support for their opposition, generally blamed the economic distress of the late thirties on the "sub-treasury" scheme and on the specie circular. Calvin Colton, writing in 1844, reiterated their argument that such a measure would lead to the destruction of liberty:

Rome was free till the system of sub-treasury was introduced. So it was in Greece. So it has been in every country that has lost its freedom. The peculiarity of the sub-treasury system is, to separate government from the people, to raise it above them, to make it independent and the people dependent--SLAVES!⁴⁰

In summarizing the effects of Jacksonian rule upon the prosperity and well-being of the nation, Colton charged the Democracy with perpetrating a "systematic attack" on "all the commercial habits of the nation," and with opposition to all "sound financial policies." "Maliciously Jackson attacked all the great institutions of the

³⁹National Intelligencer, March 12, 1831; Daniel Webster, Works, III, 392; Robert C. Winthrop, "Memoir of the Hon. Nathan Appleton," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, V (1861), 279.

⁴⁰Colton, Clay, II, 47.

country, internal improvements, first, then the currency, finally the tariff." History, in Colton's judgment, had justified Clay's opposition to Jacksonian despotism:

What patriot, what man that lived through that fearful period, to know what it was, by some taste of calamities, can look back upon it without shuddering at the perils through which the nation was doomed to pass? . . . the Bank of the United States destroyed, the protective policy crippled, manufactures drooped, and establishments were tumbling into ruins, every specie of property had depreciated to a mere nominal value, thousands who had supposed themselves rich, found themselves bankrupt, and sheriffs and their deputies were almost the only vocation worth pursuing. The spirit of the people was broken. . . .

But if Colton, a Hamiltonian and a fervid advocate of the American System, felt that the restoration of the Bank, the tariff and internal improvements essential to the elevation of the people's spirit, there were many within the Whig coalition who did not share this viewpoint.⁴¹

The ascension of John Tyler to the presidency brought Whig disunity into dramatic focus. Not only did Tyler, a states rights free trader sympathetic to nullification, hold the protective tariff in aversion, he had no intention whatsoever of consenting to the re-creation of a "monied monster" to regulate the nation's currency. He received surprising support from within Whig ranks, even though his opposition to views ultimately forced his faction out of the party. In fact, Whig disavowals of support for Biddle's demands for the re-chartering of the Bank of the United States reflected more than mere opportunism. There were many in the party who had come to share the Jacksonians' aversion to an alliance of private banking interests and

⁴¹Ibid., 29.

public finance. Even such staunch nationalists as Daniel Webster and Caleb Cushing sustained Tyler's stand. Webster, Tyler's Secretary of State, defended the administration position on the ground that the regulation of the currency could never be safely entrusted to private banking interests which stood to profit from the extension of the circulating medium. In a striking reversal of his opinion of several years earlier, Webster now found that the temptation to use government deposits for speculative purposes rendered private control most unreliable. Cushing declared that no "corporation of mercenary men" could be relied upon to use the public monies exclusively for the public good. He called for the ultimate separation of the power to make money and the power to lend it. Tyler proposed, and Cushing and Webster supported, the creation of a national governmentally controlled financial institution, divorced from private interests and denied the right to engage in speculative activities or discount private notes.⁴²

Whig divisions on the question of a national bank reflected several basic considerations. States rights Southerners had long regarded such an institution as a dangerous constitutional innovation, leading to "consolidation" of federal power. Many Whigs formerly inclined to sympathize with Biddle's position were disenchanted by the maladministration of his institution which followed the revocation of its national charter. Albert Gallatin exclaimed in protest on the occasion of the bank's attempts to impede the resumption of specie payments, in 1841: "In every respect it has been a public nuisance.

⁴²Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind In American Civilization (New York, 1946), II, 617-618.

The original error consisted in the ambitious attempt to control and direct the commerce of the country; in the arrogant assumption of a pretended right to decide on the expediency of performing that which was an absolute duty; and in the manifest and deliberate deviation from the acknowledged principles of sound and legitimate banking . . . this disgraced and dangerous corporation should not be permitted any longer to exist." Nathan Appleton, also once a bank advocate, in the same year declared: "A great central power, independent of the general or state governments, is an anomaly in our system. Such a power over the currency is the most tremendous which can be established. Without the assurance that it will be managed by men free from the common imperfections of human nature, we are safer without it." Others of Whig persuasion accepted the Jacksonian arguments that the Bank constituted an unjust infringement of rights of free competition. Laissez faire convictions led these Whigs to oppose the re-creation of a "money power." Richard Hildreth rejoiced that in the course of the selfish struggle between Jackson and Biddle "for the exclusive privileges of a bank, those exclusive privileges were abolished." "The country," Hildreth predicted, "will be the gainer." Though many Whigs still believed in the necessity of creating a new national banking institution, dissension was widespread in the ranks.⁴³

There were thus several Whig versions of the meaning of the party battles of the Jackson era. To states rights Southerners of the Tyler stamp, the struggle was waged against the encroachments of Federal power as expressed through the despotic proclivities of King

⁴³Callatin, Writings, III, 406; Nathan Appleton, Remarks on Currency and Banking (Boston, 1841), p. 36; Richard Hildreth, Banks, Banking and Paper Currencies (Boston, 1840), p. 84.

Andrew. Jackson's nationalism, combined with the egalitarian leveling tone of the Jacksonian appeal, alienated the more conservative planter elements of the South. To the advocates of the American System, both Eastern industrialists and Western agrarians, the Whig mission was the protection of those wise financial measures, advocated by Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, which if implemented would guarantee progress and prosperity to all classes. Their objection was not to Jackson's nationalism, but rather to the strict constructionist, limited government viewpoint held by the Jacksonian party. To some, the rise of the Jacksonian movement signaled the corruption of the Republic as numbers ruled and the rich, the well-born and the able yielded to King Mob. Unreconstructed Federalists, these partisans of Whiggery were most decidedly opposed to majoritarian democracy. But there were others within the Whig ranks who were as sincerely democratic as the partisans of old Hickory, whose opposition to the Jacksonian movement reflected no disagreement with the basic premises of popular sovereignty. Few political parties in our history have been as heterogeneous as the Whig. Abolitionists and slave holders, mercantilists and free traders, Hamiltonian Nationalists and Jeffersonian states rights advocates, reformers and reactionaries, all flocked to the Whig banner, attracted by a common opposition to Jacksonian rule.

Yet, despite this diversity, certain unifying themes in Whig propaganda are most prominent. Generally, spokesmen for the movement claimed to be conservatives resisting radical Jacksonian assaults on the Constitution, the rights of property and the foundations of civilized society. Usually, they countered the radical Jacksonian argument of the existence of conspiracy against the "producing classes" of

society by arguing that all classes are bound together by a common dependence and by common economic interests. Northern Whigs freely defended capitalism and the corporation from the charges of extreme Jacksonian partisans by pleading that in a free society, any man of merit could acquire wealth and prominence. Whig spokesmen also painted an appealing picture of the happy, prosperous America of the future, where all would be ennobled by the great progress capitalism would make possible. When slave holding plantation owners of the South, bound tenuously to the Whig alliance, questioned their own stake in this capitalist society, they were told by the defenders of the party that they had more to fear for their peculiar institution in the radical levelings of locofocoism than in the sound, constitutional conservatism of Whiggery.

CHAPTER III

JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY AND NINETEENTH CENTURY HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The first comprehensive historical account of the Jacksonian era to come from the pen of a professional American historian was completed in 1857, barely a decade after Jackson's death, by George Tucker, a retired University of Virginia professor of political economy. That his task was by no means an easy one, Tucker, a Southern Whig of strong Unionist sympathies, was well aware. "General Jackson, of all men who have acted the chief parts in the great political theatre," Tucker wrote, "has excited the most discordant sentiments of his countrymen, not excluding Mr. Jefferson. While he has been eulogized by one party as a second Washington, and by even a few as Washington's superior, he has been denied by most of the other party, any one virtue but courage and decision and has been pronounced wanting in all the essential requirements of statesmanship and civic duty. It requires then, the contemporary historian to be on his guard against that natural tendency of the mind to represent facts according to his wishes and feelings."¹

Though Tucker's wishes and feelings inclined him to a decided sympathy for the Whig cause, he endeavored to gain some measure of

¹George Tucker, The History of the United States from Their Colonization to the End of the Twenty-Sixth Congress, in 1841 (Philadelphia, 1856-1857), IV, 22; Leonard D. Heiderman, "A Social Scientist of the Old South," Journal of Southern History, II, 148-163.

objectivity by stating all viewpoints with as high a degree of accuracy as possible. Drawing upon state papers, Congressional debates and partisan political pamphlets, Tucker filled his volumes with lengthy paraphrases of their contents. Thus, though the historian himself harbored decidedly anti-Jacksonian sentiments, his narrative contained a fair portrayal of both sides of the political debate. Thus, his work represents the efforts of a scholar intent upon understanding the issues of the period, rather than those of the partisan intent upon praise of his party and condemnation of the opposition.

Tucker, though critical of the narrowly political history of his day ("historians," he had written in 1835, "should make us acquainted with the progress of society and the arts of civilization ... with everything, indeed, which is connected with the happiness and dignity of man"), nonetheless, restricted his own narrative of the American past to a chronology of past politics, replete with a blow-by-blow account of by-gone Congressional debates. Characteristic of the historical writing of his age, his work is almost devoid of insight into the social or economic background of the political events he reported.²

In his passages of interpretation, Tucker, who regarded the party system as the true guarantor of "the highest civil freedom," echoed the Whig protest that the Jacksonian party was devoid of fixed principles, its followers united only in their adulation of the old Hero and their lust for office. Issues, he complained, were subordinated to personalities; the political process lost its former rationality and American political struggles, their meaningfulness, as the cry

²George Tucker, "A Discourse on the Progress of Philosophy and Its Influence on the Intellectual and Moral Character of Man," Southern Literary Messenger, I, 405-421.

"Huzzah for Jackson" echoed across the land. Tucker regarded it as a symbol of the degradation of modern times that loyalty to Jackson had come to replace loyalty to principles. He lamented the prevalence of the cult of personality.

Never before [he wrote] had parties turned on considerations merely personal to an individual, and involving no political principle Support or opposition to the President continued to be the chief line of party divisions throughout the whole of General Jackson's administration, and it comprehended individuals of all the parties that had previously existed in the United States--Federalists and Democrats, States Rights men and latitudinarians, Bank and anti-Bank, tariff and anti-tariff partisans, the friends and enemies to internal improvements at the national expense--men who agreed in nothing else but the wish to keep General Jackson in office, and to keep out his opponents. Thus prompted, they supported him in every assertion of power which he thought proper to make.³

The Jacksonians, in Tucker's analysis, contributed little but confusion to American political life.

For the leader of the Jacksonian party, Tucker, true to his Whig predilections, had little regard. Though less violent in his castigations of the General than the typical Whig pamphleteers, Tucker nonetheless endorsed their judgment of Jackson as a semi-illiterate, bellicose, military chieftain devoid of political understanding and unfit for the presidency. Wilfulness and violence marked his temperament: "a state of war not only suited his taste, but he took pleasure in proclaiming it to all the world. ... the most striking feature of his administration was that its presiding officer was unceasingly engaged in a series of angry controversies which, whatever their origin, always assumed more or less of a personal character." Ignorance and lack of judgment characterized his policies: "however we may be disposed to admire his firmness and constancy of purpose in carrying out his

³Tucker, History, IV, 56.

measures . . . we must regard all his attempts to benefit the currency, the commerce, or the finances of his country, as singularly unfortunate." The "lesson" taught by a study of Jackson's administration was, to Tucker, unmistakable. The people must never again elevate "to the presidential chair anyone who is not generally believed to be conversant with questions of statesmanship." Repeating the customary Whig indictments of Jackson's war against the Bank, and speaking of the demoralization of the public service which followed the inauguration of the Jacksonian spoils system, Tucker gave almost full credence to the Whig interpretation of the Jacksonian movement.⁴

In one important respect, however, Tucker indicated a partial sympathy for the Jacksonian cause. Though he had written a defense of the Bank of the United States in 1839, and dismissed most of the charges against that institution as sheer demagoguery in his History, Tucker's historical narrative of the Bank War was hardly that of an uncritical partisan of Nicholas Biddle. Like many other Whig thinkers, Tucker had come to accept much of the laissez faire philosophy and looked to a liberal, rather than mercantilistic, capitalism as the best hope of national economic advancement. Consequently, he was by no means prone to look with favor upon the centralization of financial power in the hands of a single, powerful financial corporation. Giving some credence to Jacksonian fears, Tucker condemned Biddle's "offensive defiance" of the government and people of the United States and regarded with no little apprehension the Bank's tremendous control over the currency and its capacity to manipulate public opinion through the bribery of editors and politicians. To be sure, Tucker considered the unregulated state

⁴Ibid., IV, 139, 288-293.

banking system highly inadequate, but he felt the power of a national bank potentially productive of "far greater evils." Thus, Tucker's interpretation of the Jacksonian era, though clearly in the Whig tradition, was also grounded in part in a liberal, laissez faire philosophy soon to dominate the conservative mind in America. As we shall see, its impact upon Jacksonian historiography was to be most pronounced.⁵

Tucker's History enjoyed only a limited circulation and exerted little influence on American thought. If any single work may be said to have molded the late nineteenth century's image of Andrew Jackson and his movement, that work would unquestionably be James Parton's three volume Life Of Andrew Jackson. Published on the eve of the Civil War, Parton's work was the first comprehensive, literary treatment of Jackson's career and was long considered a masterpiece of successful biography. His volumes were amply praised, quoted and paraphrased. For over a generation they served as the standard account of Jackson and his movement and were thoroughly mined by the historians of the period.⁶

Parton, the first scholar to make extensive use of obscure Jacksonian source materials, hoped to transcend the partisan animosities and political bias which, he felt, had rendered earlier biographies useless. In his private correspondence he spoke of his concern that his work should be "in all respects complete and reliable." Dismissing previous partisan accounts of Jackson and his administration as "lies and trash," Parton traveled throughout the Union, interviewing the

⁵Ibid., IV, 187-188. Earlier Tucker had advocated a sort of federated banking system, involving the creation of regional central banks. See George Tucker, Theory of Money and Banking Investigated (Boston, 1839).

⁶Hilton E. Flower, James Parton, The Father of Modern Biography (Durham, 1951).

surviving members of Jackson's administration and gathering source materials for his study.⁷

Parton's interpretation of the Jacksonian movement, however, was by no means without a pronounced political viewpoint. Though Parton was quite sympathetic to Old Hickory as a person, there is much truth to John Spencer Bassett's charge that this biographer generally accepted, uncritically, most of the charges of Jackson's political enemies, "then disposed of them with a smile. Under his touch, President Jackson becomes the great, blundering, well-intentioned doer of most of the politically bad things of the day."⁸

Parton, a cultivated New Yorker who in his youth had supported Henry Clay and who, at the time of the writing of his Life of Jackson, adhered to a patchwork political creed composed of Jeffersonian idealism, Manchesterian laissez faire, free soil republicanism, and Spencerian Social Darwinism essentially echoed the frequent Whig protest that the Jacksonians were rude barbarians unfit to rule. Their incompetence he found vividly symbolized by their leader:

his ignorance . . . and passions combined to render him, of all conceivable beings, the most unfit for office . . . his ignorance of law, history, politics, science, of everything which he who governs ought to know, was extreme . . . Andrew Jackson was, in fact, a fighting man, and little more than a fighting man . . . His will tyrannized over his friends, over Congress, over the country. No Dionysus of old was more the autocrat than he. Unapproachable by an honest opponent he generally could be wielded by any man who was lavish enough in his praise.

That Jackson meant well, Parton, like Tucker, had no doubts. But had

⁷Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁸John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1935), p. viii.

not Thomas Buckle, "the greatest man who ever wrote history," rightly observed, "There is no instance of an ignorant man who, having good intentions and the supreme power to enforce them, has not done more evil than good." This, to Parton, summarized Jackson's presidency. "The good which he effected has not continued, while the evil he began remains, has grown more formidable, has now attained such dimensions, that the prevailing feeling of the country, with regard to the corruption and inefficiency of the government, is despair."⁹

But, unlike the Whig polemicist, Parton's mind was tortured by doubts. His rejection of the Jacksonian influence in American politics was by no means an unqualified one. However distasteful Parton may have found old Hickory's "ignorant and autocratic" administration of the government, Parton was too deeply steeped in Jeffersonian idealism to remain completely unmoved by Jackson's devotion to the popular cause. Like Bancroft, James Parton believed that Jackson embodied the hopes, the aspirations and the innate wisdom of the common folk of America:

Autocrat that he was, Andrew Jackson loved the people, the sons and daughters of toil, as truly as they loved him. He was in accord with his generation. He had a clear perception that the toiling millions are not a class in the community but are the community. He knew and felt that government should exist only for the benefit of the governed, that the strong are strong only for the sake of the weak . . . he did not comprehend these truths as they are demonstrated by Jefferson and Spencer, but he had an intuitive and instinctive sense of them. And in his most autocratic moments he really thought he was fighting the battle of the people and doing their will while baffling the purpose of their representatives.

Unlike Bancroft, however, he did not find this transcendental kinship with the common man enough to redeem Jackson and his administration. He could not share the Jacksonians' radical egalitarianism. Despite his

⁹James Parton, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1860), III, 85, 694-700.

Jeffersonian faith--or, one might even say, because of it--Parton firmly believed in rule by an "aristocracy of intellect" pledged to the well-being of the people and of the nation. By no means could he accept the notion, commonly associated with the Jacksonians, that any man is as fit as any other to hold public office and that all citizens have the right to try for a place at the public trough. Because of the long ascendancy of that "pernicious attitude," Parton wrote, "the affairs of the United States have been conducted with a stupidity that has excited the wonder of mankind . . . public questions must not be left to the wranglings of demagogues, drunkards, savages and mad men." Nor did Parton's Jeffersonian belief in the wisdom of representative government extend to an unqualified acceptance of the political competence of the uneducated and the ignorant. Applauding Van Buren's opposition to unrestricted universal suffrage in the New York constitutional convention of 1821, Parton exclaimed, "He had the courage and the wisdom to insist that true democracy does not require that manifest absurdity, which is called 'universal suffrage.'"¹⁰

Though accepting the mass franchise--an accomplished fact in his day--even advocating its extension to women and affirming, though rather uneasily, that the general enlightenment of the public now made popular sovereignty workable, he nonetheless expressed his strong aversions to those voters who "could feel, but not think, listen to stump orations, but not read, who could be wheedled and flattered, and dulled by any man who was quite devoid of public spirit, principle and shame, but who could be influenced by no man of honor." To Parton, the Jacksonian era

¹⁰Ibid., III, 85, 400, 694.

symbolized, in large measure, the triumph of that vicious class.¹¹

Believing in the existence of a Golden Age and in a subsequent fall from grace, Parton on occasion lapsed into moments of nostalgia for the pre-Jacksonian past, for the decorous era of Jefferson and Madison, when the wise and cultured ruled the nation and the ignorant were excluded from public life. Commenting upon the demise of the old caucus system of nomination, Parton mused:

The breaking down of the caucus system was not the unmixed blessing which it was hoped it would be . . . the change was perfect in theory, but most imperfect in practice. It enlarged the sphere of intrigue. While King Caucus reigned . . . the game was snugger and cleaner than afterwards, when every political center in the union became a little Washington and every drinking house a nest of president makers. Under the old system a man of talent, force, originality, sincerity had a chance of becoming President; under the new, all have a chance save such.

The Jacksonians' introduction of the spoils system into national politics provided for Parton the focal point of his protest against the degradation of modern times. This innovation, he lamented, "debauched" the government and corrupted the life of the Republic. As treacherous, obscene politicians crowded to the public trough, the "cultured man of sterling worth" could no longer survive in the quest for place and position. "The government, formerly served by the elite of the nation," wrote Parton, "is now served by its refuse . . . the spoils system renders pure, decent, orderly and democratic government impossible."¹²

But though Parton deplored many aspects of the mass upsurge which brought Jackson to power, he nonetheless retained his faith in majority rule. Castigating Henry Clay for his failure to support Andrew

¹¹Ibid., III, 119, 129, 701; Michael Kraus, The Writing of American History (Norman, Oklahoma, 1953), p. 316.

¹²Parton, III, 30, 214-221.

Jackson's claims to the presidency in 1825, Parton, echoing Jacksonian publicists, accused the Kentucky politician of harboring a federalist's contempt for the popular will: "The candidate that had come closest to an election by the people was the one for whom a truly democratic member of Congress would have given his support. All questions respecting the comparative fitness of the candidates were impertinent." Whatever his misgivings about the Jacksonian movement, Parton could not accept any political creed which denied the ultimate sovereignty of the people. Scolding the refined and educated classes in America for their slavish imitation of European ways, their lack of comprehension of "the great sentiment which breathed life into this great republic," their dismal conservatism, Parton, again echoing Jacksonian spokesmen, proclaimed that the Jacksonian movement represented the overthrow of decadent "silver forked aristocracy" unworthy of political prominence. He lauded the intuitive genius of the people in a passage that well might have come from the pen of Jackson, Benton or Bancroft:

The truly helpful men and women of this republic have oftenest sprung from the cabin and learned to read by the light of pine knots, and worked their way up to their rightful places as leaders of the people by the strength of their own arm, brain and resolution.

Obsessed by the evils of the spoils system and the dreadful vulgarity of Jacksonian rule, Parton never really decided whether Jackson's triumph truly represented these creative, self-made leaders, or not. The burden of his argument led to a negative answer. He could not believe in the wisdom or the virtue of the cohorts of Old Hickory, but even less could he embrace a thoroughgoing elitist, anti-democratic philosophy of government. This glaring inconsistency in his view of democracy Parton never resolved.¹³

¹³Ibid., III, 59, 150.

In large measure, Parton's interpretation of the Jacksonian era reflected a distaste for politics and politicians common to educated gentlemen of his day. But his enthusiastic acceptance of Manchesterian economics and Spencerian Social Darwinism, then becoming quite fashionable among the well-read, also colored his view of Jackson and his administration, as did his New York origin and his Republican political preference. Whatever his aversion to Old Hickory's autocratic predilections and vulgar political methods, Parton found it difficult to sympathize with Jackson's political opposition. A Unionist and a free soiler writing in 1839, he found the viewpoint expressed by the Tyler Whigs, Calhoun, and the South Carolina nullifiers the rankest sort of political heresy. Jackson's nullification message, he declared, "glowed with the fire of genuine patriotism," the position of those who did not accept his nationalism smacked of treason. And as a disciple of Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, and Herbert Spencer, he found the "paternalistic view of government" espoused by the National Republicans and the Clay Whigs equally inadmissible. In lines quite reminiscent of Van Buren's Senate Speech of 1823, Parton denounced the policies of the administration of the second Adams as incompatible with "true liberty." He declared that those who believed that "government should undertake great national works, such as bridges, canals, and roads, should found great national institutions, such as colleges, banks, libraries, museums, and laboratories, monopolize certain branches of industry, such as carrying letters and teaching children in the common schools," were, at heart, "lovers of despotism." "These American lovers of the paternal government theory stop short of state churches and titles. But in the essence of the matter, there is little difference I can see between the

opinions of the Emperor of Russia, Louis Napoleon, Thomas Carlyle, the old Federalists, Horace Greeley and the Tribune." True liberty, Parton asserted, could be found only in adherence to the Jeffersonian maxim, "he governs best who governs least." Jackson and Van Buren he found far more sympathetic to that noble truth than Clay or Webster. Hence, he could find little wisdom in the Whig position on most of the partisan issues of the day: "want of wisdom," he declared of that party, "marked their conduct from the beginning to the end of Jackson's administration."¹⁴

Parton's essential interpretation of the party battles of the Jackson era is best exemplified in his treatment of the bank controversy. The Jacksonians' assault on the Bank of the United States he regarded with grave suspicion. Jackson, he felt, acted not out of the rational conviction that the Bank endangered liberty, but rather from personal hostility to Nicholas Biddle. His conduct reflected the violence of his temperament. His supporters, furthermore, were moved, not by sincere opposition to monopoly, but by hope of selfish gain: "The real object of the politicians who surrounded Jackson was not to rid the country of a monstrous monopoly, but to add to the sum, already prodigious, and alarming, of government patronage." The tenor of the campaign against the recharter proposal he deemed "arrogant, ferocious, and mean," compounded of low demagoguery and personal spite. He concluded that the charges leveled against the Bank by its political opponents were mostly false. Yet, opposing on doctrinaire grounds all grants of special governmental privilege, he could not support Biddle's cause and ended his account of the Bank war by praising Jackson's veto message as a great

¹⁴Ibid., III, 83, 409, 590. Parton erroneously declared Jackson to be the author of the Nullification Message, which in reality was composed by Livingston.

state paper embodying noble and sound principles of government.¹⁵

Parton's interpretation of the Jacksonian movement was thus one of tortured ambivalence. Convinced that the triumph of Jackson represented, or at least reflected, the destruction of a decadent old order unfit to survive, certain that the movement's basic economic and social principles were wise and sound, he nonetheless could not accept fully its political implications. The rough turbulence of Jacksonian politics he found highly distasteful; the spoils system and the notion of rule by majority prejudice had, in his judgment, degraded the Republic, yet the arrogance, selfishness, and "paternalism" of Jackson's political opponents appeared even more unacceptable. Parton concluded his Life of Jackson with an appeal for the emergence of a new cultured elite devoted to democratic ideals, capable of redeeming the nation from Jacksonian vulgarity but not inclined to "paternalistic despotism," an elite well-grounded in "the truths of Jefferson and Spencer." The calamity of the United States," Parton wrote, "has been that the educated class has not been able to accept the truths of the democratic creed."¹⁶

If Parton's Jeffersonian idealism made it difficult for that scholar to reject the Jacksonian movement out of hand, no such qualms disturbed Dr. Hermann von Holst, a German-born historian whose early lectures on the Jackson era had moved Henry Adams to rejoice that "America has had a career which is studied with the same thoroughness

¹⁵Ibid., III, 397, 517, 590. Unfortunately, Parton did virtually no research on the Bank question; his account is not particularly reliable. He expressed his belief in the possibility that in its later years the Bank followed policies which were most "unwise, if not criminal," (III, 494). But all in all, his account is non-committal.

¹⁶Ibid., III, 699-700.

that German scholars devote to every branch of knowledge." Von Holst, student of Haesser and friend and associate of the eminent German historians von Sybil and Treitschke, spent the latter years of his life in the United States, publishing in 1891 the second volume of his Constitutional and Political History of the United States, which dealt with the Jacksonian years. The Constitutional History won almost unanimous praise from American scholars, then caught up in almost worshipful adulation of all things German. Herbert Baxter Adams wrote von Holst, that his work was "very generally recognized among American scholars as the most critical and, at the same time, as the most impartial and thoroughly scientific treatment to which the constitutional and political history of the United States has hitherto been subjected."¹⁷

That von Holst's treatment of the American past should have elicited so sympathetic a response from the scholars of the Gilded Age is by no means surprising. Von Holst, despite his German background, shared their point of view, habits of thought and unconscious biases to so striking a degree that a recent student has quite aptly termed him "the plumed knight of American Historiography." Relentlessly crusading against those whom genteel conservatives of a genteel era considered evil doers, von Holst, in common with most of his professional colleagues

¹⁷Charles R. Wilson, "Hermann Eduard von Holst," The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography, ed. William T. Hutchinson (Chicago, 1937), pp. 60-83; Eric Goldman, "Hermann Eduard von Holst: Plumed Knight of American Historiography," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIII (March, 1937), 511-532; Kraus, pp. 191-198; Lucie Hammond, "Hermann von Holst, the Historian," American Monthly Review of Reviews, XXIX, 321-322; J. Franklin Jameson, "Professor von Holst as a Historian," University Record of the University of Chicago, VIII, 156-160; Laughlin J. Lawrence, "Life and Character of Hermann E. von Holst," ibid., 161-168; Henry Adams, Review of Die Administrations Andrew Jacksons by Hermann Eduard von Holst, North American Review, CCXLV (January, 1875), 180.

in the United States, allied himself with the Republican party, sharing both its strong moral fervor--the crusade against slavery he made the grand theme of his History and the struggle against corruption in government the object of his own occasional political activity--as well as its essential economic conservatism. He strongly advocated laissez faire, labeled the "middle classes" the "backbone of every civilized community" and praised "the arts of gain" as "the most powerful agencies of civilization." He defended the nationalist tradition in American history, regarded Alexander Hamilton as "America's greatest political genius," looked upon Jefferson with suspicion, and considered Andrew Jackson a dangerous demagogue. He placed strong emphasis upon that "conservative sense which a democratic republic needs more than any other form of state" and denounced the influence in politics of the propertyless urban proletariat.¹⁸

Von Holst's treatment of the Jacksonian era reflected both his biases and his temperament. Prone to moralize, sharing with the Prussian school which trained him the conviction that the past has a lesson to teach the present, von Holst turned his narrative of the 1830's into a tract against "the Jacksonian degradation of democracy." In many ways a typical German bourgeois liberal, von Holst perceived in Jackson's emergence as leader of the nation, the triumph of a political force he regarded with great apprehension, "the masses." The German writer was familiar with Bancroft's characterization of Jackson as the incarnation of the virtues of the common people. But whereas Bancroft had perceived in Jackson the mystic spirit of the nation, von Holst saw

¹⁸Goldman, 531; Hermann Eduard von Holst, The Constitutional and Political History of the United States (Chicago, 1879), I, x, 158-160; IV, 74-75; Life of John C. Calhoun (Boston, 1893), p. 2.

only the symbol of a deplorable mediocrity triumphant in politics. Quite without Bancroft's transcendental faith in the intuitive wisdom of the majority, von Holst deplored Jackson's kinship with the common man:

Washington [he wrote] was the embodiment of the best traits of the American national character, but Jackson embodied all its typical traits. He was unquestionably, a man of great parts, but he was at the same time incapable of rising, in any respect, to the height of a great man . . . in spite of his frightful influence, in the real sense of the expression, which he exercised during the eight years of his presidency, he neither pointed nor opened new ways to his people by the superiority of his mind, but only dragged them more rapidly onward on the road they had been traveling, by the demoniacal powers of his will. The supports of his policy were the instincts of the masses, the sum and substance of it, the satisfaction of those instincts.

That Jackson embodied the popular will von Holst did not for a moment doubt; it was precisely for that reason that he found the Jacksonian influence in American life highly distasteful. "Popular sovereignty," von Holst wrote, "would be a dreadful condition of things." The popular rule of the Jacksonian era, by reducing politics to the level of the lowest common denominator and eliminating the role of truly inspired, creative leadership, he wrote, led to "the stagnation of the public spirit" and paved the way for "the shallowing, materializing and demoralizing of American democracy."¹⁹

Despite this antagonism towards direct democracy, von Holst was by no means hostile to the American experiment. In his Constitutional History he lauded the American belief that "the sole source of all power is the people" and regarded the "moral convictions of the people" as a

¹⁹Von Holst, Constitutional and Political History, II, 24, 29-31. Von Holst, reflecting the influence of German Romanticism, had so little sympathy for revolutionary thought that he was led to reject most of the thinking behind the Declaration of Independence as the product of Enlightenment decadence, French in origin and, as such, not really a part of the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition (I, 32).

"decisive force" in human progress. In many ways typical of the European liberalism of the nineteenth century, von Holst placed heavy emphasis on the antithesis between representative government and "mob democracy" and stressed the need for institutional restraints on the momentary whims and prejudices of the people. The Jacksonians, he charged, "raised the caprice of a majority to the dignity of the sole law of the land." This "was not a postulate of democracy, but the overthrow of the constitutional state. In a democratic constitutional state the legal and binding rule is not the will of the majority of the people expressed in any way that suits their whim, but the will of the majority expressed in the way provided by the constitution, and in no other."²⁰

The bulk of von Holst's indictment of the Jackson administration rests on this point. In essence, von Holst's interpretation represents a restatement, in somewhat refined form, of the charges of "unconstitutional usurpation" and "executive despotism" first raised by Whig Congressional spokesmen. Von Holst candidly admitted his reliance upon these partisans. "There is no reason even today," he wrote, "why the warning which Clay and Webster addressed to the people should be scoffed at." To the German born scholar, the true significance of the party battles of the Jackson era lay in the Whig attempts to defend the Constitution; the great menace to liberty, in Jackson's assertion "in conflict with the constitution and with the idea of republicanism, to a position between Congress and the people as a patriarchal ruler of the republic." "Jackson's personal guilt in this most essential result of his administration," he explained, "was not occasioned so much by individual determinate action as by his conception of the position of the

²⁰Ibid., II, 8, 78.

president to other factors of government and to the people."²¹

Von Holst, conditioned perhaps by his European experience, feared above all else a strong executive, capable of playing the role of the autocrat or the demagogue to subvert the rule of law. "The history of all time and all nations," he wrote, "teaches to what dangers liberty is exposed when too much power is placed in the hands of one man." His study of the Jacksonian years reinforced this conviction: "Since Louis XIV, the maxim, L'etat, c'est moi, has scarcely found a second time, so ingenious and complete an expression, as in Andrew Jackson. The only difference is that it was translated from the language of monarchy into the language of republicanism." In Jackson's claim to be "the direct representative of the American people, elected by the people and responsible only to them," von Holst claimed to perceive the beginnings of "chaos and despotism," arguing that such an interpretation of the role of the president would undermine the Constitution:

The Constitution knows only a president as a bearer of executive power, of a "direct representative of the American people" it knows nothing. Hence, it also knows nothing of an election of the president by "the people." It is the intention of the Constitution that the electors should not be mere ciphers, but the only real choosers of the president . . . Finally, the Constitution entirely ignored the president's responsibility to "the people" . . . the only forum before which it cites the president to account for his political acts is the Senate, when the representatives had preferred an impeachment charge against him. Indeed, the Constitution does not know "the people" at all, in the sense in which Jackson uses the term. It creates legal relations, but it does not overthrow the law by elevating every majority of those possessed of the right to vote, no matter how constituted, above the law, by making their will the law. In the United States, indeed, the "people" are the one original source of law, but it is the "people" in their entirely definite, aggregate, political, that is, constitutional organization, that is meant here. Any other "people" as an independent source of law, as a legal political forum, is not only unknown to the Constitution, but if admitted by it, would be its destruction, for

²¹Ibid., II, 67-70.

it is the purpose of that instrument to create an unarbitrary state, while such a "people" is the negation of an unarbitrary state. It was to the "people" in this anti-state sense of the word that Jackson appealed in all his controversies about his rights. In other words: the holder of the executive power made the subordination of the state to society the determining principle of the republic, which, in the highest sense, should have been an unarbitrary, law respecting state.

Few aspects of Jackson's administration escaped von Holst's censure. Preoccupied with the dangers of "arbitrary power," the German historian generally based his condemnation on legal or constitutional grounds and displayed little interest in economic or social considerations. Though von Holst, almost alone among the historians of his generation, wrote an unqualified defense of Nicholas Biddle and the second Bank of the United States, even on that key issue, the burden of his argument rested on legalistic, constitutional issues. Though blaming Jackson's "autocratic actions" for "the frightful disturbances which the economic life of the country experienced" in the last years of his "rule," von Holst sheds little light upon actual economic conditions. Jackson's stand on the recharter issue and his removal of the deposits was found reprehensible largely because of alleged violations of the constitutional limitations of executive power and of the rights of contract. Jackson's excessive use of the veto, including his refusal to sanction the recharter of the Bank, for example, von Holst labeled "counter to the spirit of the Constitution." Old Hickory's suggestion that he be consulted by Congress on the framing of a new Bank charter was deemed a dangerous departure from constitutional precedent. Even his submission of a written paper to his cabinet was found to be indicative of Jackson's contempt for constitutionality. The removal of the deposits von Holst condemned on three counts: first, he charged that Jackson did not have the power to take such action without the consent of Congress; secondly, he deemed

the removal a wilful violation of the Bank's contractual rights; and thirdly, he denied that the President possessed the constitutional power to coerce his cabinet into acquiescence to his policies, charging, as had Clay, that the President was not, under the Constitution, invested with total executive power but shared those powers with other executive officers. Of the latter point, von Holst added ominously that if Jackson's interpretation of his constitutional responsibilities was accepted, "then the Republic was turned over, bound hand and foot, to one man."²²

Von Holst's interpretation of the Jacksonian era thus emphasized the dangers alleged to be inherent in direct democracy, unchecked by the most scrupulous legality and constitutional restraint. Fear of mob rule and of a strong executive are the twin themes which permeate almost every page of his narrative. In a rare impressionistic passage, von Holst, in characterizing the tone of Washington society in the months following Old Hickory's inauguration, provided a dramatic summary of his loathing of the Jacksonian spirit in politics: "The capital of the Union presented a revolting picture. Flattery, servility, espionage, tale bearing and intrigue thrived as they scarcely ever had in the most infamous European courts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only the court varnish was wanting. Jackson himself, when not in a towering rage, possessed an unstudied dignity which impressed the masses, but through the general political atmosphere of Washington there ran a streak of genuine brutality." The Jacksonians had degraded and debauched the Old Republic.²³

Though to the modern reader, von Holst's constitutional arguments

²²Ibid., II, 44-46, 49, 75.

²³Ibid., II, 44.

seem strained and pedantic, it by no means follows that they were the product of the German scholar's inability to comprehend American institutions. It is true that his preoccupation with the form and structure of constitutional organization and his lack of insight into the social and economic realities underlying the formal structure of government reflected his training in the German universities. Like most of his European teachers and colleagues, von Holst's conception of governmental structure was a highly static one; lacking an adequate conception of social change, his writings tended to blindly oppose most constitutional innovations. (Interestingly enough, von Holst, for all his professed sensitivity to constitutional orthodoxy, and all his fears of a centralized executive, was quite indifferent to the fears of the states rights school and may be considered a most pronounced nationalist. Thus, one might argue, von Holst, sworn enemy of constitutional heresy, gave his support to the most pervasive constitutional "innovation" of all: the nationalizing and centralizing of the federal compact.) But von Holst's conception of the American constitution would have been quite comprehensible to Joseph Story or James Kent; his indictment of the Jacksonian "revolution" (the term is von Holst's) basically derived, not from German conservatism, but from the American Federalist and Whig traditions. Time and time again, von Holst took his interpretation of the Jacksonian era directly from the pages of Daniel Webster and Henry Clay. He was quite unabashed in admitting his Whig partisanship. Whig spokesmen in his judgment were quite correct in seeing in the Jacksonian movement the first stages of a democratic despotism which, if unchecked, might overthrow the constitution and plunge the nation into autocracy and chaos. But it is important also to note that unlike most Whig

statesmen, von Holst made no concession to the democratic spirit of the day and never reconsidered his profound fear of the rule of King Numbers. The log cabin and hard cider held no charm to this aloof bourgeois intellectual. In reality, he may more aptly be termed a neo-Federalist than a Whig; his aversion to the vulgar masses was quite as profound as his admiration for Alexander Hamilton.

Von Holst was by no means alone in his deep distaste for the vulgarity of the Jacksonian version of democracy. To Henry Adams, brilliant scion of a noble family ill at ease in an ignoble age, the triumph of the Jacksonians symbolized the utter degradation of the Republic. Disposed both by heritage and temperament to look with disdain upon the pretensions of mass democracy, Adams once wrote to his brother Charles, with regard to an article he hoped to publish exposing the political corruption of his day, "I am going to make it monumental, . . . a blow at democracy." An inveterate aristocrat, Adams longed for the orderly and decorous world of his presidential forbears. An elitist, he deplored the necessity in democracy "of uniting with much of the purest and best in human nature the mass of ignorance and brutality lying at the bottom of all societies." In his earlier years, as professor of history at Harvard and author of the magnificent multi-volumed History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison, Henry Adams cherished the hope that somehow, despite the evil omens of the Grant era, the "purest and best" would eventually triumph and the American democratic experiment succeed. In his later years, as one of the few Americans to grapple with the problem of the ultimate meaning in history, he lost all faith and wrote bitterly that

by the mid-twentieth century "present society must break its damn neck."²⁴

Adams, to this day the foremost historian of the Jeffersonian decade, wrote little of the Jacksonian era. But in his random comments on the unhappy years following the political repudiation of the Adams dynasty (to be found in his biography of Albert Gallatin), one finds the seeds of his later final rejection, not only of the American historical experience, but of the concept of progress as well.

In his Life of Albert Gallatin (in many respects Adams' most disappointing work), the New England scholar noted America's loss of "creative energy" in the years following the electoral defeat of the second Adams. "Political life," he observed, "no longer represented a great political conception" but descended to the vulgarity of market place and counting house. With "the irruption of President Jackson and his political following," Adams lamented, "the last relics of the early statesmanship of the Republic" [John Quincy Adams, his grandfather, and Albert Gallatin the subject of his somewhat despairing study] "were thrown out of political life." The nation thereupon settled into a period of sordid, disorderly political mediocrity; neither party could find the way to political regeneration, for both reflected the diseased spirit of the times. "The politics of the United States now offered as melancholy a spectacle as ever held up to derision. Of all the parties in the United States the famous Whig party was the most feeble in ideas and the most blundering in management; the Jacksonian democracy was corrupt in its methods, and both as well as society itself were deeply

²⁴Henry Adams, The Letters of Henry Adams, ed. Worthington G. Ford (Boston, 1930), p. 186.

cankered with two desperate sores, the enormous increase of easily acquired wealth, and the terribly rapid growth of slavery and slave power." Unable to summon creative political energy to resolve these deep dilemmas, the nation "suffering a vast derangement of the national health," drifted into the "moral convulsion" of the Civil War. It emerged from that ordeal with its health only "part restored." The time of statesmanship, of devoted adherence to a "great political conception" had passed, and Henry Adams mused darkly on its passing. "The United States of 1830," he wrote sorrowfully, "was no longer the same country as the United States of 1789."²⁵

Some years after his reflections on the degradation of the Jacksonian era, Adams attempted to frame a philosophy of history explaining the tragedy and futility of human endeavor. Applying (or as most modern critics would have it, misapplying) Kelvin's second law of thermodynamics, the dissipation of energy, to history, Adams, once a Comptean optimist, saw in the future nought but continuing entropy, progressive loss of vital power and spiritual force, and ultimate final stagnation. From the unity of a grand conception, symbolized by the Virgin of Chartres to the multiplicity and purposelessness of the present, symbolized in the dynamo, Adams traced in the brilliant prose of the Mont Saint Michel and the Education a pattern of almost total despair. That this loss of faith was no sudden happening is evident to the careful reader of the writings of his earlier years who finds it at the root of Adams' interpretation of the Jacksonian movement.²⁶

²⁵Henry Adams, The Life of Albert Gallatin (Philadelphia, 1874), pp. 496-497, 635-637.

²⁶Perhaps the best analysis of Henry Adams' historical thinking may be found in William H. Jordy, Henry Adams: Scientific Historian (New

If the passing of the era of statesmanship, of the "great political conception," said to mark the ascension of Jackson, filled Henry Adams with regret, it inspired in his less moderate brother, Brooks, thunderous wrath. "Democracy," Brooks Adams wrote, "has failed to justify itself." Andrew Jackson, its typical spokesman, represented only the triumph of "the principle of public plunder." By 1828, such a "level of degradation" had been reached, such a "fall in the intelligence and intellectual energy of the democratic community" had occurred, that the man "of perception and understanding," according to this son of the house of Adams had no choice but to repudiate the "democratic dogma" in disgust.²⁷

While Henry Adams endeavored to devise a philosophy of history based upon the application of the insights of the physical sciences to the problems of human civilization, the majority of his intellectual contemporaries were more intrigued by the potentialities of making such an application of the biological sciences. The efforts of Herbert Spencer to apply the Darwinian theory of evolution to human society won from scholarly Americans of the Gilded Age the most unqualified praise. Social Darwinism soon became the vogue of the day. It was not without its relevance to the problems of historical interpretation.

The High priest of the Social Darwinist cult in America was, without question, Professor William Graham Sumner of Yale University.

Haven, 1952); Elizabeth Stevens, Henry Adams (New York, 1955) and Ernest Samuels, Henry Adams, The Middle Years (Boston, 1958) are also of value.

²⁷Brooks Adams, introduction to Henry Adams, Degradation of the Democratic Dogma (New York, 1920), pp. vi, 77-85. For an analysis of Brooks Adams' historical thinking, see Thornton Anderson, Brooks Adams: Constructive Conservative (Ithaca, 1951).

Sumner, long celebrated for his pioneering work in sociology and anthropology and customarily identified with the conservative tradition in American economic thought, was also a highly competent historian, in many ways one of the most insightful of his time, his rather intense prejudices notwithstanding. Sumner brought to the study of history the assumptions and predilections of a highly dogmatic, intrepidly conservative Social Darwinist, committed to absolute laissez faire. His writing of history reflected this deep commitment.

Sumner's chosen field of investigation was the Jacksonian era. "No period," the Yale professor declared in an address before the Kent Club in 1880, "equals in interest the administration of Andrew Jackson." In 1882, Sumner published his account of the happenings of the Jackson years, Andrew Jackson As a Public Man.²⁸

There were few American scholars less disposed to sympathize with Jacksonian democracy, or to find in Old Hickory a statesman of greatness, than William Graham Sumner. Sumner shared little of James Parton's sentimental democratic idealism. The egalitarian notions generally associated with Parton's hero, Thomas Jefferson, Sumner dismissed as a "fantastic, preposterous dogma." The Sage of Montecello he labeled "a womanish purveyor of popular platitudes."²⁹

More acute than Parton, Sumner perceived a fundamental contradiction between the doctrines of Jefferson and "the truths of Spencer,"

²⁸William Graham Sumner, "The Administration of Andrew Jackson," The Forgotten Man and Other Essays (New Haven, 1918), p. 338.

²⁹William Graham Sumner, Andrew Jackson (Boston, 1899), pp. 31-32, 255, 434-435, 349. Sumner held Jefferson responsible for "that political Jacobinism, nullification." He did, however, praise Jefferson for his "non-interference theory of government."

which the New York writer had regarded as almost complementary. An ardent believer in the virtues of the "survival of the fittest and the elimination of the unfit," Sumner found the Jeffersonian creed a potential obstacle to human progress and betterment:

Let it be understood [Sumner wrote] that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; non-liberty, inequality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and benefits all its members, the latter carries society downwards and favors only its worst members.

In an essay published a year after Andrew Jackson As A Public Man, Sumner declared the greatest danger in a democratic society to be the perversion of the state into a "system of favoring a new privileged class of the many and the poor." In Jeffersonian egalitarianism Sumner found the intellectual roots of this dreaded perversion. In Jacksonian majoritarian democracy he perceived the beginnings of its implementation.³⁰

The coming to power of the masses, associated with Jackson's electoral triumph in 1828, in Sumner's judgment, increased immeasurably the ever present danger that the "unfit" might band together to use their political power to interfere with the "natural order" and promote their own selfish, indefensible desire to survive. Such an occurrence, Sumner declared, reasoning from the premises of Social Darwinism, would gravely imperil continued human progress. The Jacksonian era provided a few illustrations of this threat. Writing of the fondness for inflationary financial measures cherished by many of Jackson's supporters, Sumner, a hard money democrat frightened by the agrarian radicalism of his day, assailed their use of government to "advance the interests of

³⁰William Graham Sumner, What the Social Classes owe to Each Other (New York, 1883), p. 37; Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 37.

the classes which have the least money and the most votes." Speaking of the propensity, in the West, of Jackson's supporters to agitate for debtor relief legislation, he lamented the fact that "democratic republican government" made it possible for a "corrupt majority of debtors" to "rob the minority of creditors." Analyzing the Jacksonian agitation against the Bank of the United States, Sumner found their opposition to recharter grounded in "ignorance of the realities of money and credit" compounded with political opportunism and mob hatred of the wealthy and prosperous. The "wanton hostility" of the "democratic element" in American life toward their social superiors Sumner deemed truly ominous. The Jacksonian doctrine that "if a man is only sufficiently ignorant, his whims and notions constitute plain common sense" he regarded as the precursor of economic disaster. "There are no questions," Sumner wrote, "on which this dogma acts more perniciously than on questions of banking and currency."³¹

It was Sumner's belief that both social stability and human progress required restraint of the will of the majority. Though more optimistic about democracy in his earlier years, the Yale professor came to deny, toward the last of his career, that liberty and democracy could be successfully and harmoniously reconciled. The Jacksonian belief in the wisdom and virtue of the great masses he could never accept. If "true liberty under law" were to be maintained and democracy kept from self destruction, Sumner wrote in his biography of Jackson, "the swaying wishes of the hour must be bound under broad and sacred constitutional provisions." Sumner was among the first to perceive that the Founding Fathers feared democracy and wished to fix stringent limitations upon the

³¹Sumner, Andrew Jackson, pp. 265-268, 277-279, 302-310, 345-349.

"rule of the people" in the federal structure. Unlike J. Allen Smith and Charles A. Beard, who developed this theme at length three decades later, Sumner shared the Founders' fears of unrestrained popular rule and argued that only through strict constitutionalism and adherence to the ideal of limited government could liberty and individual freedom be maintained.³²

The Jacksonians, of course, were by no means in disagreement with Sumner's laissez faire philosophy or his devotion to the ideal of strict constitutionality. It was Sumner's conviction, however, that Jacksonian majoritarian democracy and these ideals could not be reconciled. In this, he echoed the private fears of the most conservative of the Whigs.

In his treatment of the constitutional issues of the Jacksonian period, Sumner gave full credence to Whig cries of Jacksonian despotism. Unlike the Whigs, however, he placed the blame squarely upon the people themselves and challenged the assumptions of majoritarian democracy accepted, publically at least, by Whig and Jacksonian alike. Benton's insistence that legislators in a democracy are morally bound to express

³²William Graham Sumner, "Advancing Organization in America," in Essays of William Graham Sumner (New Haven, 1934), II, 340-360. For some reason this essay was not published during Sumner's lifetime. At the time of the writing of his studies of the Jacksonian era, Sumner retained faith that, with the proper restraints, American democracy could guarantee that maximum degree of individual freedom necessary to insure human progress. Deeply shaken by the events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries--in particular by the emergence of an American imperialism--Sumner lost that faith and came to doubt whether the ideal of the free individual could survive in the face of onrushing socialism, militarism and imperialism. His Folkways is pervaded with this spirit of pessimism and disenchantment. For an excellent brief analysis of the evolution of Sumner's thought, see Chapter 16 of Ralph Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York, 1956). Also of value are Harris E. Starr, William Graham Sumner (New York, 1925) and Albert G. Keller, Reminiscences of William Graham Sumner (New Haven, 1933).

the majority will of their constituents, Sumner labeled "an assault on the Constitution," adding, "such a doctrine is the most pernicious of political heresies. A constitution is to a nation what self-control under established rules of conduct is to a man . . . the demos krates principle, to use Benton's jargon, belongs to the same category as Louis XIV's saying, L'etat, c'est moi. The one is as far removed from constitutional liberty as the other." The question of majority rule or constitutional government he deemed the most "portentous . . . issue that can ever arise in American political life." Sumner left no doubt that, in his opinion, if the rule of King Numbers should ever triumph completely, both liberty and progress in America would come to a halt. He deplored the fact that "the Jacksonian doctrine has permeated our whole community far too deeply." He felt that the major political evils of his day emanated from that "unfortunate" development.³³

Andrew Jackson's election to the presidency symbolized, for Sumner, the triumph of the unrestrained democracy: in Andrew Jackson, the vulgar masses, impatient of all restraint and jealous of all talent and wealth, found a champion who typified their own prejudices.

One can easily discern in Jackson's popularity [Sumner wrote] an element of instinct and personal recognition by the masses of the people. They felt "he is one of us" . . . he thinks as we do." The anecdotes about him which had the greatest currency were those which showed him trampling on some conventionality of polite society, or shocking the tastes and prejudices of people from abroad . . . his adherents had a most delightful sense of their own power in supporting him in defiance of sober, cultivated people who disliked him for his violence, ignorance and lack of cultivation.

Sumner, foreshadowing Frederick Jackson Turner, regarded Jackson as a product of the West. But whereas Turner saw the West as the

³³Sumner, Andrew Jackson, pp. 126-128; The Forgotten Man and other Essays, p. 349.

birthplace of those American institutions which made this nation truly superior to Europe, Sumner regarded the frontier as the spawning ground of most of the distasteful aspects of American life. He disliked its agrarian radicalism. He was horrified by the "barbarism" of western life. After pausing to reflect on the widespread acceptance by white settlers of the Indian custom of scalping one's enemies, Sumner characterized the Westerners as men who "derogated from the status of their race" and judged them "incapable of the steady labor of civilized industry . . . idlers and thrifters almost always too fond of strong drink." Sumner did not doubt for one moment that Jackson was indeed the product and champion of the West, but he found little cause to rejoice that the Western influence had triumphed in national politics. The election of Andrew Jackson, he complained, "meant that an uneducated Indian fighter had been charged with the power of the presidency."⁸⁴

Yet, despite his extreme distaste for the Jacksonian version of democracy, Sumner nonetheless found in the movement a strong undercurrent of laissez faire liberalism. Jacksonian economic policies won his approbation. Hence, his condemnation of the Jacksonian influence in American political life was by no means unqualified. He found himself in essential agreement with the Jacksonians on most of the specific issues of the period.

Though, as a spokesman for hard money and financial stability Sumner disliked the inflationist policies which certain elements within the Jacksonian party endorsed, and deplored the "malice" and "ignorance" of Jackson's assault on the Bank, he approved of the termination of that institution's national charter. As a doctrinaire disciple of the

⁸⁴Sumner, Andrew Jackson, pp. 7-9, 100.

classical economists, Sumner rejected completely Biddle's belief in the regulation and control of the currency by a nationally chartered banking institution, and looked with disfavor upon private note issues. Biddle, he wrote, adhered to an "unsound, obsolete theory of government finance." Sumner actually accepted fully the Jacksonian charge that the concentration of economic power in the hands of the Bank rendered that institution a potentially dangerous force in American life. Rejecting the theory expounded by Biddle, that it was the right and obligation of the Bank to regulate and stabilize the currency of the nation, Sumner, in his History of Banking in the United States, argued against the vesting of such powers in private hands. The bankers of the Jacksonian period, Biddle included, he found highly irresponsible and quite prone to defy the higher authority of law and the state. "The banks," he wrote disapprovingly, " . . . disregarded law so habitually that it became a commonplace that law could not bind them." He argued for the necessity of establishing "the authority of the state over banks." In his insistence on the necessity that the currency must not be totally subjected to the whims of private speculation and the self-interest of private bankers, Sumner occupied a common ground with Jackson, Van Buren and Benton. There is little in Sumner's position on currency matters that a radical Jacksonian of the hard money persuasion would have found objectionable.³⁵

Jackson's opposition to monopoly and special privilege, his veto of unnecessary internal improvements, and his objections to the extension of the powers of the federal government all impressed Sumner as

³⁵Ibid., p. 401; William Graham Sumner, The History of Banking In the United States (New York, 1896), pp. 351-352.

wise and sound. With some reluctance, he conceded that "it came in Andrew Jackson's way to do some good, to check some bad tendencies and to strengthen some good ones."³⁶

Ironically enough, Sumner, staunch Gilded Age conservative, was most attracted to that faction of the Jacksonian party which conservatives of the 1830's and 1840's regarded with horror as a dangerously radical menace to organized society. Though Sumner deplored the "egalitarian theorizings" of the Locofocos, he found them free of the corruption and spoils system politics which he felt characterized the Jacksonian movement as a whole and applauded their strict insistence on fidelity to the principles of laissez faire. This splinter group, he wrote, "contributed the most to the welfare of the country. The democratic party was for a generation by tradition the party of hard money, free trade, and the non-interference theory of government. If that theory is traced back to its source, it will lead, not to the Jacksonian party of 1820, but to the Locofocos of 1835."³⁷

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Sumner did not rest content merely to pass judgment on Jacksonian Democracy. A thorough scholar, he endeavored to find an explanation for the amazing growth and vitality of the Jacksonian movement. He found the main causes of the "new upheaval in democracy," symbolized by Jackson's election, to be economic. The Jacksonian demands for the extension of the franchise and for the unqualified acceptance of majority rule, Sumner declared, were rooted in the unprecedented prosperity of the nation. He explained that:

³⁶Sumner, Andrew Jackson, p. 279.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 433-438.

A great body of persons here who had been used to straightened circumstances . . . now found themselves prosperous, every year improving their condition. . . . This class expanded under the sun of prosperity both its virtues and its vices. It became self-reliant and independent. It feared no mishap. It laughed at prudence. It had overcome so many difficulties that it took no forethought for any yet to come. It loved dash and bravado and high spirit. It admired energy and enterprise as among the highest human virtues. It scorned especially theory or philosophy, and professed exaggerated faith in the practical man.

Andrew Jackson, in Sumner's analysis, symbolized and articulated the aspirations of this vast mass of commoners made bold by unprecedented prosperity.

The antagonisms of economic interest groups, in Sumner's view, also gave strength to the Jacksonian cause. Economic cleavages in the Jacksonian era he found largely sectional in nature. The Jacksonian movement gave expression to the economic demands of Southern agricultural interests desiring free trade and Western frontiersmen desiring free land. The Whigs, on the other hand, represented the vested interests of Eastern mercantile and industrial capitalism. Of their land policies Sumner wrote:

The old states saw clearly . . . that everything which enhanced the attractiveness of the land, and made it easier to get at, was just so much force drawing the man who had no land and no capital out of the wages class. Every improvement in transportation, every abolition of taxes and restrictions like the corn laws, which kept American agricultural products out of England, every reduction in the price of land, increased the chances of the man who had nothing to become by industry an independent landowner. Old states were forced to offset the attractiveness of the land by raising wages. . . . Eastern interests also favored taxes on clothing, furniture and tools which would reduce the net return of the land. Lower wages would then suffice to hold the laborers in the city.

While the land policies of the Eastern interests alienated the West, their support of a protective tariff enraged the South. Sumner sympathized with the Southern viewpoint, though condemning their espousal of

nullification. "The Southern grievance" he declared "undeniable." He likewise approved the West's demands for access to the land. He found in the righteous grievances of these sectional interests the economic basis of Jacksonian Democracy.³⁸

In germinal form, many of the major themes later to play a dominant role in twentieth century historical interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy may be found in Sumner's writings. The influence of the frontier, the sectional conflict, the role of economic self-interest in determining political behavior, all are mentioned briefly and somewhat incompletely in Andrew Jackson As a Public Man.

Unfortunately, Sumner's often acute historical insights were dulled and blurred by his sense of mission. Possessed of an unfortunate propensity to excessive moralization, Sumner often obscured his interpretations of Jackson and his movement with a regrettable subjectivity. Hence, his portrayal of the economic and social forces producing Jacksonian Democracy is much less clear and explicit than might be desired. Richard Hofstadter has remarked aptly, Sumner's temper was "that of a proselyter, a moralizer, an espouser of causes with little interest in distinguishing between error and iniquity in his opponents." Nonetheless, despite its obvious bias and occasional errors, Sumner's Andrew Jackson remains for its day an exceptional historical work. Sumner, long recognized as a pioneer American sociologist and anthropologist, may perhaps also be termed the first competent historian of the Jacksonian era.³⁹

³⁸Ibid., pp. 178-182, 231-232, 395-400.

³⁹Hofstadter, p. 29.

In most respects, Sumner's treatment of the Jacksonian era was much superior to that of his contemporary James Schouler, who devoted the fourth volume of his massive History of the United States Under the Constitution, published three years after Sumner's biography, to the Jacksonian years. Though Schouler made more extensive use of the sources of the period than Sumner--he spent uncounted hours poring over the Jackson and Van Buren papers held by the Library of Congress and utilized many documents hitherto ignored by scholars--his interpretation of the Jacksonian movement reflected a narrow Whig partisanship. Schouler, the Republican son of a Whig journalist, filled the pages of his History with an anti-Jacksonian polemic most reminiscent of the partisan bombast of the Jacksonian years. His account sheds little light upon the more sophisticated problems of historical causation raised in Sumner's study. Didactic denunciation of the Jacksonians and all their works provided the basic theme of Schouler's account of the age of Jackson.⁴⁰

Schouler, in effect, arraigned the Jacksonians before the bar of history and charged them with responsibility for that corruption and debauchery of the American Republic which reached its height in the scandals of the Grant era. "There was a vigorous vulgarity about Jackson's administration at every point," he contended. "The painted Jezebel of party patronage seized upon the public trusts for her favorites . . . Andrew Jackson was the first president from what we call

⁴⁰Lewis Ethan Ellis, "James Schouler," The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays In American Historiography, ed. William T. Hutchinson (Chicago, 1937), p. 90; Michael Kraus, The Writing of American History (Norman, Oklahoma, 1953), pp. 198-202; James Schouler, Historical Briefs (New York, 1903).

the masses, the first whose following vulgarized, so to speak, the national administration and the social life of the capital. . . . Jackson's iron rule ploughed long furrows into the back of the republic whose scars are still visible,"⁴¹

Schouler gave almost total credence to the customary Whig charges of Jacksonian despotism. Though he ameliorated his harsh portrayal of Jackson and his followers somewhat by granting that "Old Hickory . . . was honest and upright in the general endeavor to give his countrymen a high and noble administration," on most points he deemed the Jacksonian rule a national catastrophe. He found the old Hero basically a rude though honest demagogue, motivated in part by honor but more by "jealousy and the desire for revenge." In true Whig fashion, he found Jackson in his conduct of the presidential office "the veriest autocrat" who ever ruled in America. He wrote that under Jackson's guidance, the Democratic party "became an army of occupation under a commander-in-chief, entrenched in office . . . with all the resources of national influence at command to resist, if need be, majorities and public opinion." Schouler found Jackson's conception of the powers of the presidential office subversive of the Constitution. He declared Jackson's introduction of the spoils system into national politics responsible for debasement of the public service. He charged that Jackson's appointments vulgarized the national government. "Certainly no list so lengthy and with so many mean and even infamous characters had ever before been presented by an American executive." He repeated the Whig stories of the sinister activities of the mysterious Kitchen Cabinet,

⁴¹James Schouler, History of the United States under the Constitution (New York, 1885), IV, 267-268, 273.

reporting that on many issues Jackson's mind had been "poisoned by evil councillors." He solemnly quoted Daniel Webster on Andrew Jackson's irresponsible incitement of "the poor against the rich." There were few Whig accusations Schouler failed to reproduce and endorse in his narrative of the Jacksonian years.⁴²

To the impressive list of Jacksonian sins culled from standard Whig sources Schouler added one of his own discovery: Old Hickory, a tool of the slave interest, was partially responsible for the disruption of the Union in 1861. "Most pernicious of all . . . Jackson initiated the treacherous policy of Mexican dismemberment and annexation for the sake of slavery." Assailing Jackson's "pseudo-patriotic motives" in thus serving the slavocracy, Schouler charged Old Hickory with an indirect responsibility "for the worst that followed after he set the ball in motion."⁴³

Yet, despite the hostile tone of his evaluation of the Jacksonian administration, Schouler differed with the Jacksonians on few matters of basic philosophy. Endorsing their espousal of free trade and laissez faire, he conceded that in the party debates of the day, the "Jacksonians had the better principles." Though he condemned the Jacksonian attack on the Bank of the United States as unprincipled demagoguery and regarded its demise as a financial catastrophe, he agreed with the Jacksonians in principle, declaring that no such institution could be tolerated in a free society. His portrayal of Nicholas Biddle was no less harsh than his treatment of Old Hickory. Nor did he share

⁴²Ibid., III, 44-47, 455ff; IV, 195-196.

⁴³Ibid., IV, 272.

Sumner's aversions to the principles of majority rule. His account of the struggle of the masses to gain the franchise was in fact quite sympathetic. Schouler, like Parton, regarded himself as a Jeffersonian Democrat.⁴⁴

In part, the contradiction between Schouler's acceptance of much of Jacksonian theory and his almost total rejection of Jacksonian practice may be explained by his essential conservatism and aversion to change. The Jacksonian incitement of the "rich against the poor" filled this scholarly Republican lawyer with genuine alarm. He lamented the "general spirit of lawlessness" which, in his judgment, permeated the Jacksonian movement. In a passage most indicative of his deepest prejudices, Schouler deplored that the coming of Jackson was attended by manifestations of "political folly" such as "the increasing tendency to popular legislation, such as the abolition of the death penalty, the treatment of crime as a sort of disease to arouse one's pity, the relaxation of all punishment, all restraint." There was little of the reformer in Schouler's temperament. He perceived altogether too much of the reformist spirit in the Jacksonian crusade, and altogether too little respect for the rights of property and the sanctity of the old verities.⁴⁵

In larger measure, however, Schouler's distaste for the Jacksonian movement reflected his preoccupation with the single reform cause which commanded his sympathies, Civil Service. It is most revealing that a disproportionate part of Schouler's narrative is devoted to the manifold horrors of the spoils system. The lengthy passages

⁴⁴Ibid., IV, 196, 257-258.

⁴⁵Ibid., IV, 201-202, 260-271.

portraying the "reign of terror" in Washington which allegedly followed Old Hickory's elevation to the presidency, attained an angry eloquence quite out of keeping with the normally pedestrian and labored style of Schouler's prose. Indeed, the other aspects of the Jacksonian years were largely eclipsed by Schouler's preoccupation with this topic. It may be that his concern with the political problems of his own day, his tendency to castigate the Jacksonians for the sins of the stalwarts, provides the basic key to Schouler's intense anti-Jacksonian animus.

In Carl Schurz's two volume Life of Henry Clay, one encounters again the same paradox posed by James Parton's analysis of the Jacksonian political heritage. Schurz approved wholeheartedly of virtually every policy championed by Andrew Jackson: opposition to the re-charter of the Bank of the United States, suppression of nullification, issuance of the specie circular, veto of the Maysville Road Bill and of Clay's Land Bill, as well as the Jacksonian tariff policies and conduct of foreign relations, all are applauded in Schurz's study. Nonetheless, the "Mug-Nump" Senator from Missouri regarded Jackson's influence in American political life highly malevolent and concluded that Old Hickory's "lawless example debauched public standards of decency." In one of the most vociferous condemnations of an American president to come from the pen of an historian, Schurz declared that:

Andrew Jackson violently interrupted good constitutional traditions, and infused into the body politic a spirit of lawlessness which lived after him, and of which the demoralizing influence is felt to this day . . . the present generation has still to struggle with the barbarous habits he introduced on the field of national affairs, when his followers, taking possession of the government as a "spoils" presented the spectacle of a victorious soldiery, looting a conquered town. There can be nothing of a more lawless tendency than the "spoils system" in politics, for it makes the coarsest instincts of selfishness the ruling motives of conduct, and brutalizes public life. Jackson brought forth a crop of corruption which startled the country.

In essence, this is the devil theory of history. Schurz's distaste for Jacksonian Democracy is, of course, understandable. The greater portion of the Missouri Senator's career was consumed in an often futile struggle against the spoils system and corruption in government. In his view of the Jacksonian past, all else was largely eclipsed. Schurz's Clay may perhaps be termed "Mug-Wump" history.⁴⁶

Jackson as "devil" is invoked by two other noted scholarly statesmen of the Gilded Age, Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge. Both men shared to some extent Schurz's preoccupation with Civil Service reform, and were thus hardly disposed to deal affectionately with the alleged author of the spoils system. Both shared Schurz's sensitivity to "lawlessness" and "demagoguery." Fearing the rising tides of agrarian radicalism and urban discontent which terrified the "better people" of their day, neither could regard with favor politicians accused, as were the Jacksonians, of fomenting class hatred. However, unlike the anti-imperialist Schurz, both Lodge and Roosevelt were caught up in a new movement sweeping America in the closing years of the nineteenth century, bellicose, imperialistic nationalism. This too, as we shall see, colored their view of Andrew Jackson, inclining one to sympathetic appreciation, the other to blind rejection of Jackson's leadership.

"I guess the gentle mugwumps will feel their hair curl when they look at some of the sentences in my Ben-ton," Roosevelt wrote Lodge soon after the completion of his biography of the great Jacksonian congressional leader. Roosevelt's work bears the stamp of his bellicosity.

⁴⁶Carl Schurz, The Life of Henry Clay (Boston, 1867), II, 107-111.

In its pages he celebrated the spirit of the frontier, praised the war-like, Manly Westerner as the "true American" and sneered at the effete, pacifistic Easterner. In the "masterful and overbearing spirit of the West" Roosevelt found the source of the nation's greatness. Westerners, he wrote, "were and are the finest members of our race . . . every inch men . . . Americans through to the very heart's core." These, he sang, were the men who "wrought out the destinies of a nation and a continent."⁴⁷

In Andrew Jackson, Roosevelt perceived the perfect embodiment of all the strength, vigor and manliness of this Western super-race. "Jackson early loomed up as the greatest representative of his people and his section." One might then anticipate that Roosevelt would welcome the infusion of such vigor in national affairs. Not so. Though he rejoiced in Jackson's staunch nationalism and patriotic heroism, he nonetheless declared that "Jackson's election is a proof that the majority is not always right." The fault lay in the very region that gave Jackson his greatness. The West, breeding place of heroes though it might be, was also the spawning ground of all manner of unwise public policies. Roosevelt, a foe of the free silver and green-back schemes of his own generation, found Jacksonian financial policies deplorable. He roundly castigated his beloved West for its fondness for "dishonest money," wildcat banking and debtor relief legislation. He found that Jacksonian banking and fiscal policies reflected Western financial irresponsibility. "No possible financial policy could have introduced such widespread ruin and distress as did the system introduced by Jackson." Roosevelt expressed the usual Gilded Age horror of the

⁴⁷Witing Morison, (ed.), The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt (Cambridge, 1951), I, 169; Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Hart Benton (Boston, 1886), pp. 19-22, 34-38.

Jacksonian "degradation of government." "The public service," he wrote, "then took its first and greatest step in that downward career of progressive debasement that has only been checked in our day." This development he clearly found the fault of Andrew Jackson, now characterized as an ignorant frontiersman of "narrow mind and bitter prejudices." Roosevelt's final judgment of the Jacksonian influence in American life was highly unfavorable. Writing some years before his emergence as a Square Dealer and a Progressive, he borrowed a phrase from William Wirt (without acknowledgment) and contemptuously characterized the Jacksonian era of popular rule as "the millenium of the minnows."⁴⁸

Roosevelt's Thomas Hart Benton is, as Harvin Meyers remarked, "a fascinatingly ambivalent treatment of the 'Western influence' in American politics." Its contribution to the understanding of the Jacksonian era is slight; it is perhaps of more value in what it lends to an understanding of the complex, often confusing Mr. Roosevelt.⁴⁹

Henry Cabot Lodge was hardly prone to share Roosevelt's romanticizing of the bellicose frontiersman as the true American. However, his biography of Daniel Webster contained strong undertones of the nationalistic fervor which colored the thoughts and political deeds of both men. Interestingly enough, Lodge found Andrew Jackson insufficiently patriotic. Resurrecting a forgotten Whig condemnation of Jackson's foreign policy, Lodge charged Old Hickory with subservience and cowardice in his dealings with England. The basis of the charge was

⁴⁸Roosevelt, Benton, pp. 33, 73-74, 83, 86, 137-139; John Pendleton Kennedy, Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt (Philadelphia, 1850), II, 223.

⁴⁹Harvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (Stanford, 1960), p. 11n.

found in Jackson's abandonment of his predecessors' insistence that negotiations on the West Indies fishery dispute be handled on the basis of "right" rather than "privilege." Lodge declared: "This was, of course, at variance with all traditions, was wholly improper, and was mean and contemptible in dealing with a foreign nation." In other respects also, Lodge reiterated uncritically standard Whig interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy. On only one important issue did he deviate from Whig orthodoxy; he favored a strong executive and dismissed Whig fears of presidential despotism. Unlike most other historians of his period, Lodge defended Whig support of the tariff and internal improvement legislation and denounced Jackson's veto of the bank recharter bill. On all issues he found Jackson's policies governed by "crass ignorance."⁵⁰

Though Lodge's Webster was extreme even for its day in its conservatism and its intense anti-Jacksonian bias, few contemporary writers of biography were disposed to disagree with the scholarly Massachusetts Senator's rejection of Andrew Jackson and all his works. The Jacksonian image in the popular biography of the Gilded Age was one decidedly unsympathetic to the cause of Old Hickory and his followers. Biographers, both of Jackson and of his contemporaries, drew a harsh portrait, both of the leader of the movement and his followers, which, if not so extreme as the partisan caricatures of Jackson's day, emphasized the same basic themes. While individual aspects of the Jacksonian program might win approbation--opposition to nullification and advocacy of laissez faire generally--the consensus of Gilded Age biographers

⁵⁰Henry Cabot Lodge, Daniel Webster (Boston, 1883), pp. 116, 123.

deemed the Jacksonian influence in American political life highly pernicious. John T. Morse, editor of the highly popular American Statesman series, expressed their viewpoint when he remarked to Henry Cabot Lodge, "Let the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian beware. I will poison the popular mind !!"⁵¹

The biographer of Lewis Cass, Andrew C. McLaughlin of the University of Michigan, struck the dominant note when he charged Jackson with being "the conduit pipe through which flowed into the field of national administration a tide of political prescription, intrigue, and legerdemain."⁵² "Under the fostering wings of Jackson's administration," McLaughlin cried, "a whole brood of evil political fledglings matured." The Michigan professor found Jackson responsible for most of the political corruption of the nineteenth century. John T. Morse labeled General Jackson "the representative hero of the ignorant masses," sharing their ignorance, violent proclivities and lack of understanding of the affairs of state. It was to their unwholesome political influence that Jackson owed his elevation to the presidency, in Morse's judgment. Morse was one of the few writers to charge Jackson with lack of firmness in his handling of the nullification crisis, complaining that Jackson "was satisfied to have the instant emergency pass over in a manner superficially creditable to himself by an outburst of temper, under the cover of which he sacrificed the substantial matter of principle without a qualm." Had John Quincy Adams still been president, he declared, South Carolina would have been more properly and firmly reproached and the principle, i.e., the American System would have been

⁵¹ Merrill Peterson, The Jefferson Image in the American Mind (New York, 1960), p. 225.

saved. Thornton W. Lothrop, in his Life of William Henry Seward, repeated the customary charges of Jacksonian despotism, writing that Jackson "made war, without regard to constitutional or legal principles or limitations, upon any policy or institution he disbelieved in, or which was supported by men who withstood his imperious will."⁵²

Among the very few biographers of the Gilded Age to praise the Jacksonian version of democracy, Edward M. Shepard, author of a life of Martin Van Buren, was the most capable. Shepard, a New York lawyer and amateur politician whose loyalties to the conservative, hard money wing of the Democracy led him to follow Grover Cleveland out of the party in 1896, paid homage to the dynamism and vitality of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian heritage. In castigating the writers of his day for their lack of sympathy for the "political creed of Jefferson, Van Buren and Tilden," Shepard observed, "if one were to judge the political temper of the American people from many of our own writers, he would believe that temper to be sordid, mean, noisy, boastful and cruel." His work, Shepard resolved, would do more justice to the "true vitality" of the democratic experiment. Thus, it is not surprising that his treatment of the Jacksonian administration was far more sympathetic than that of most of his contemporaries.⁵³

The conception of Jacksonian Democracy cherished by Shepard,

⁵²Andrew C. McLaughlin, Lewis Cass (Boston, 1891), pp. 2, 137, 145; John T. Morse, John Quincy Adams (Boston, 1882), pp. 163-218, 225-252; Thornton K. Lothrop, Life of William Henry Seward (Boston, 1896), p. 20; Hermann von Holst, Calhoun.

⁵³Donald A. Roberts, "Edward Morse Shepard," The Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, XXVII(1935), 72-73; Edward M. Shepard, Martin Van Buren (Boston, 1899), pp. v, 3, 6, 9-12.

however, bore little resemblance to that liberal, agrarian egalitarianism which in later years, championed by such dissidents as Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard and Vernon Louis Parrington, was to win widespread acceptance in American historical circles. Overlooking the more radical elements in the Jacksonian party, whose "leveling" and "lawless" proclivities had profoundly disturbed other conservative writers, Shepard proclaimed the followers of Van Buren and Jackson the true conservatives of their day. He portrayed them not as the vanguards of a new upsurge in democracy--no hint that 1823 marked a new departure in American history may be found in Shepard's study--but rather as the custodians of the Jeffersonian faith, a creed grounded in such "solid virtues" as limited government, respect for individualism, laissez faire and frugality in business and government. The introduction of the spoils system, in Shepard's judgment, did mark a regrettable deviation from the precedents of the past, but on the truly vital issues of the day, the advocates of dangerous innovations in government were not to be found in the Jacksonian camp. Rather, they were enlisted under the banner of John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Their program, not the Jacksonian, threatened the continuity of republican government. In Shepard's pages, one reads again the Jacksonian denunciations of those who would subvert constitutional principles.⁵⁴

Republican government, Shepard argued, could be safely preserved only if the constitutional limitations on the powers of the federal government were strictly observed. In supporting internal improvements, a high tariff and a nationally chartered bank, the opponents of Jackson

⁵⁴Shepard, Van Buren, pp. 98, 102-103, 119-123, 153-156, 178-179, 282-349.

and Van Buren, in Shepard's opinion, undermined the very cornerstone of constitutional liberty, states rights. Were their policies to be followed, "our system of government would be enormously and radically changed" and freedom endangered. To oppose this deadly "heresy" (the term is Shepard's, though the tone is reminiscent of a Jacksonian polemic), Van Buren forged a victorious political alliance which placed Jackson in the White House in 1823 and secured his re-election in 1832. To Shepard, the Jacksonian movement was a conservative crusade to protect the status quo--limited government, states rights, and respect for the Constitution--from those heirs of New England Federalism who hoped to erect a centralist regime on the ruins of the Jeffersonian Democracy.

However, the Whig insistence on more federal activity, to Shepard was but one symptom of a more basic error, the increasing demand that government "do something" for the people. While Jacksonians adhered to the tried and tested republican virtues of thrift, frugality and strict individualism, their opponents, often unscrupulous demagogues closely allied with speculators and opportunists who "hoped to get rich quick, without honest labor," urged individuals to look to Washington for aid in the economic struggle. The tariff, the distribution of surplus revenues to the states, the alliance of government and banking, and finally, the demand in 1837, that the federal government take action to end the panic of that year, all impressed Shepard as dangerous deviations from the "true republican creed." Van Buren's rebuke of those who petitioned for government aid to relieve the commercial distress of the late thirties, he labeled both "moral courage

and political wisdom."⁵⁵

Much the same interpretation of Jacksonian Democracy as that advanced by Shepard may be found in Charles H. Peck's The Jacksonian Epoch, published in the last year of the nineteenth century. Peck declared that the Jacksonians rode to power on the tide of a "popular revolt" designed to restore the true principle of republican government, "non-interference with private rights." Their political opponents, out of touch with the thinking of the common folk of the land, had come to espouse doctrines of government designed to benefit a few privileged groups at the expense of the people. Peck, deeply influenced by Social Darwinism, deplored the American System as a departure from "the law of natural selection" and labeled Clay's land policies a conspiracy of Eastern manufacturing interests against the farmer and laborer. He accepted in large measure the Jacksonian theory that the Bank of the United States constituted a grave menace against the liberties of the people, declaring, such "a partnership of public with private interests" highly dangerous.⁵⁶

Peck was one of the few writers of his generation to defend the Jacksonian spoils system. Reiterating the arguments of Jacksonian partisans, he declared that:

The genius of our institutions is the equality of opportunity to all the people. So long as the routine business of government can be performed with reasonable efficiency without special training or prolonged experience, the greater the number of those who gain, if only a brief acquaintance with official duties, the better; for it is in a sense a means of education in popular government, which in the largest degree possible should be of the people, for the people, and by the people.

⁵⁵Ibid., 95-106, 119-123, 153-156, 162, 282-349.

⁵⁶Charles H. Peck, The Jacksonian Epoch (New York, 1899), pp. 125-137, 180-235.

In true Jacksonian terms, Peck deplored the creation "under our institutions of a great class practically secure for life of official position and depending on the government."⁵⁷

Peck explained Jackson's rise to political prominence as the culmination of the popular quest for democracy. The people by 1824, in his interpretation, had come to demand the total realization of their right to self-government. Determined to overthrow the dominance of the old school of caucus politicians, hopelessly out of touch with their feelings and sentiments, they seized upon the Old General as the symbol and standard bearer of their aspirations. That this popular uprising boded well for the Republic, Peck, unlike many of his contemporaries, had no doubts. No criticism of the principle of majority rule may be found in his work.⁵⁸

Yet, as Peck delineated "the true theory" of democratic government as he conceived it, a resemblance to the conservative orthodoxy of the Gilded Age was at once evident. Laissez faire, no governmental aid to special interests, free trade: these were principles no good Social Darwinist could question, though Republican protectionists might feel some discomfort. In basic viewpoint, Peck like Shepard, differed from William Graham Sumner only in the confidence that popular sovereignty would assure the ultimate triumph of these sound conservative principles.

Peck and Shepard were among the few historians to emphasize the basically conservative aspects of the Jacksonian movement, almost to the exclusion of all others. When, in later decades, less conservative

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 144. However, Peck gave his unqualified endorsement to the Civil Service reform movement of his own day.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 138-140.

scholars discovered anew the more liberal aspects of the Jacksonian political heritage, this interpretation would, in its turn, fade from view.

Strangely out of keeping with the dominant intellectual mood of the Gilded Age was the interpretation of Jacksonian Democracy expressed by the eminent American economist, Richard T. Ely in 1886. Ely proclaimed the followers of Jackson neither corrupters of the Republic, as a majority of the historians of his day would have it, nor guardians of states rights and laissez faire conservatism, as Peck and Shepard believed, but the true friends of the "common man." The Jacksonians, in Ely's analysis, were the first to enunciate the demands of the working people of the nation for social justice. "The Democratic party from 1829 to 1841," Ely wrote, "was more truly a workingman's party than has been the case with any other great party in our country." In the farmer-labor alliance of the Jacksonian era, Ely found a true quest for economic justice later betrayed by both major parties. Ely's identification of the Jacksonian movement with the economic aspirations of the common people of the land, and his treatment of the opposition as the spokesman of economic privilege, was essentially a restatement of the analysis of party divisions offered years earlier by certain Jacksonian spokesmen. Ely took literally the Jacksonian condemnation of the Whigs as spokesmen for an economic aristocracy.⁵⁹

Though Ely's interpretation was, in a sense, prophetic, destined to gain great currency in later years, it was ignored completely for the better part of two decades. Writers like Sumner, Roosevelt and Schurz

⁵⁹Richard T. Ely, The Labor Movement in America (New York, 1886), pp. 42-43.

shared little of Fly's sympathy for organized labor and found his socialistic views anathema. If the Jacksonian movement was an expression of the class animosities and tensions of the period--and they tacitly recognized the point in their condemnation of the Jacksonian incitement of the poor against the rich--that afforded Gilded Age conservatives no cause for praise of Jackson. Their view of the Jacksonian era, not Fly's or Shepard's, dominated the historical thought of the Gilded Age.

John Bach McMaster's treatment of the Jacksonian years in his multi-volumed History of the People of the United States, symbolized the transition from the Whig oriented historiography of the nineteenth century to the Democratic historical writing to come in the twentieth. None of that contempt for the principles of majority rule found in the pages of Sumner and von Holst colored McMaster's interpretations of the American past. On the contrary, as his biographer remarks, "No American historian, not even Bancroft, has ever glorified the people more." McMaster, professor of American History at the University of Pennsylvania, celebrated Jackson's election as a "triumph of democracy." He termed the Old General "a man of the people" devoted to "their interests and knowing their wants." The quest of the people for control of government, culminating in the Jacksonian movement, McMaster, echoing the Jacksonians themselves, labeled "a struggle between the rights of man and the rights of property."⁶⁰

That his emotional sympathies were on the side of the rights of

⁶⁰John Bach McMaster, History of the People of the United States (New York, 1883-1913), V, 55-58, 383-385, 488; Eric Goldman, John Bach McMaster (Philadelphia, 1943), p. 142.

man, McMaster left little room for doubt. The spoils system, so grave a sin against the Republic in the eyes of most contemporary historians, to McMaster was a necessary weapon in the battle for popular rule. In Jacksonian terms, he justified this innovation as essential to shatter the rule of the old aristocracy "which had used the Federal patronage to carry elections and the Federal Treasury to reward its followers." Far from condemning Jackson's proscriptive policies, McMaster found them quite justifiable: "As we look back on those days, the wonder is, not that so many were turned out of office, but that so many were suffered to remain."⁶¹

It does not follow, however, as some commentators have erroneously concluded, that McMaster was a thoroughly uncritical partisan of the Jacksonian movement. Indeed, he actually accepted quite uncritically many aspects of the Whig interpretation of the reign of old Hickory. Despite his firm belief in the rule of the people, McMaster's volumes are often highly critical of the policies on banking and public finance which the popular will apparently dictated. The Jacksonian attack on the Bank of the United States, McMaster judged in large measure the product of sheer ignorance and demagoguery. "Hundreds of thousands of voters had never seen one of its branches nor one of its notes," he remarked somewhat derisively. The argument that the Bank's power threatened the Republic he dismissed as an ignorant fantasy. The withdrawal of the governmental deposits from the Bank, justified in Jacksonian orthodoxy as imperative if the nation were to be protected from political subversion by the monied monster, McMaster deplored: "The whole system of exchange was suddenly and unexpectedly thrown into

⁶¹ McMaster, V, 518-522.

confusion." The Jacksonians, in his view, were responsible for the economic distress of the late 1830's. He agreed with those Whigs who charged that the misinformed financial bungling of Old Hickory and his cohorts created inestimable suffering for the common people of the land, whose interests they professed to defend. McMaster further condemned the inflationary monetary schemes espoused by many Jacksonians as both "vicious" and absurd.⁶²

McMaster also belittled Andrew Jackson's statesmanship. Old Hickory's handling of the nullification crisis he found weak and ambiguous. His knowledge of "the principles of government" he deemed most inadequate. McMaster's choice of personal heroes is perhaps indicative of his basic conservatism. In the eight volumes of his History only George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and Daniel Webster merited McMaster's praise; strange heroes indeed for an historian of the "people." In fact, McMaster often accepted quite uncritically partisan propaganda hostile to popular political movements. The leading authority on Jeffersonian historiography has remarked of his treatment of the Sage of Monticello: "Behind the imposing facade of the eight volumes of the History the historian announced opinions that had little foundation other than Federalist prejudice." With some justice, the same charge could be made of his evaluation of Old Hickory and his movement. Though McMaster frequently invoked "Democracy" and "the Rule of the People" a disturbing ambiguity surrounded his use of those terms. McMaster, it would appear, succumbed to the word-worship so typical of Americans of his day. "Democracy" and "the people," in his volumes,

⁶²Ibid., VI, 55, 186, 192.

become cabalistic phrases, ritualistically invoked at frequent intervals, but indicative of little.⁶³

McMaster's History, remarked Eric Goldman, "voted for McKinley." There is much truth in that judgment. Despite his pronounced sympathy for Democracy as a political movement, McMaster's views on almost all contemporary issues, free silver, Populism, economic reform, tended to conservatism. Hostile to most of the social reform movements of his day, McMaster expressed the hope that his History would prove to be "full of instruction" to the radical reformers of the 1890's, that through an appreciation of the past they might come to abandon their reformist schemes and accept the great social gains which the gradual evolution of popular rule in America had made possible. McMaster's enthusiasm for "Democracy" is indicative, not of militant liberalism, but rather of the conservative respectability which the principle of popular rule finally attained even among those of Whiggish proclivities.

In one important respect, however, McMaster made a major contribution to the historiography of the Jacksonian era. He was one of the first scholars to fully appreciate the importance of the labor movement of the Jacksonian era and to gather extensive data on that aspect of the period. His rather favorable treatment of labor's quest for social justice led one scholar to perceive in McMaster "reformist sympathies" never clearly revealed in his general treatment of American history. McMaster's general historical philosophy, grounded in fervent belief in the destiny of Democracy, might possibly be termed liberal rather than conservative. But he never harmonized this viewpoint with his

⁶³Peterson, p. 279.

interpretations of specific partisan issues of the American past. His vision of "Democracy" was a far cry from the glorification of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian heritage to come in the historical writing of the twentieth century.⁶⁴

The partisan arguments of Clay and Webster in denunciation of Jacksonian despotism, not the fervid panegyrics of Bancroft and Benton in praise of the rule of the people, set the tone for nineteenth century historical accounts of the Jacksonian era. From the appearance of the first comprehensive, professional history of the period, in the late 1850's, down to the close of the century, American historiography remained decidedly anti-Jacksonian. Far from rejoicing in the triumph of the popular will in 1828, American historians tended to regard the emergence of mass democracy with no little doubt and apprehension. Only a small minority of scholars lifted their voices in defense of Old Hickory and the political revolution he symbolized.

One of Jackson's few scholarly defenders declared of the Jacksonian historiography of his generation, "perhaps for no other period in our history has irresponsible and unverified campaign literature of the time so largely become authority to serious writers. . . ." Though this was, no doubt, a bit of an overstatement, several decades were to pass before the historical profession generally abandoned the Whig interpretation of the Jacksonian era.⁶⁵

⁶⁴McMaster, *History*, II, 616-617; John Bach McMaster, *The Acquisition of Political, Social and Industrial Rights of Man in America* (Cleveland, 1903); Charles Greer Sellers, "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIV (March, 1958), 628.

⁶⁵Shepard, p. 178.

Its long dominance may be explained in part by the political atmosphere of post Civil War America, in part by the background and social biases of the nation's historians. Preoccupied with the often ugly manifestation of spoils system democracy and alarmed by the rising agrarian radicalism of the Greenback and Free Silver movements, American historians, generally men of leisure, of essentially conservative political faith, found it difficult to share the Jacksonian belief in the wisdom and virtue of the rule of "King Numbers." To patrician scholars oppressed by the more unlovely manifestations of the democratic order--Grantism, Tweedism, corruption in government and degradation of the public service--the Jacksonian era, which seemed to mark the advent of mass democracy in all its vulgarity, held little appeal. To blame Andrew Jackson for the misadventures of Ulysses S. Grant seemed all too logical; the temptation to use the Age of Jackson as a springboard for didactic sermonizings on the horrors of the spoils system and the evils of unrestrained democracy was well nigh irresistible. Eagerly, and in large measure uncritically, the nation's scholars echoed those Whig partisans who stressed the unmitigated iniquity of those politicians who allegedly baldly affirmed, "to the victors belong the spoils."

A strong note of nostalgia may be detected in the historiography of the Gilded Age. Polite patrician reformers, these historians were singularly ill at ease in their own times. They could not reconcile themselves to the disorder of democratic politics. The spoils system, the city machines, the demagogic appeals to mass prejudices profoundly offended the fastidious sensitivities of these later day Brahmins. As the Age of Grant sank to new levels of the grotesque, as

robber barons and political spoilsmen, agrarian demagogues and Wall Street desperadoes (as they saw them, brawling uncultured barbarians one and all) strutted across the public stage, scholarly conservatives and bookish mugwumps damned Andrew Jackson for opening Pandora's Box. Profoundly disenchanted with the turbulent, somewhat sordid America of their day, they mused on an earlier America, a genteel Utopia lost in the past. Some longed for Hamilton and Adams. Others pined for Jefferson and Madison. But virtually all looked to the pre-Jacksonian republic, to times when the "capable" ruled and grateful multitudes happily accepted intelligent and enlightened leadership.

Yet, American historians were also acutely sensitive to contemporary currents of thought. As Social Darwinism became the vogue, as unrestrained individualism assumed the status of a national cult and laissez faire that of a national creed, identification with the economic position of Andrew Jackson's Whig opponents seemed increasingly untenable. After all, Clay's American System and Webster's insistence that the government must do for the people what they cannot do for themselves, smacked of the kind of paternalism that Spencer warned against and Sumner denounced. As American economic thought shifted from a mercantile capitalist to a laissez faire orientation, champions of rugged individualism and opponents of all governmental economic activity found much to praise in Old Hickory. To be sure, his "agrarianism" and his popularity with the radicals and levelers of his day was most distressing. But had he not championed that Jeffersonian ideal, "that government which governs best, governs least"? Upon reflection, his views seemed remarkably close to the orthodoxy of the Gilded Age, and those of his opponents, increasingly heretical. It was

deeply gratifying to discover that the erstwhile darling of American agrarian radicalism was, in fact, a Social Darwinist.

Thus, a certain ambivalence characterized the late nineteenth century historians' conception of Jackson and his administration. Generally condemned as the "degrader of the republic" for his introduction of spoils system politics into American life, Old Hickory was granted grudging praise for the "essential wisdom" of his economic policies.

But this qualified approbation mitigated only slightly their intense distaste for the Jacksonian influence in American politics. To most historians, Jackson symbolized the ugliness and corruption of mass democracy, and little else. Few critics, however, actually come to grips with the theoretical aspects of this problem. Some, Hermann von Holst and William Graham Sumner notably, repudiated popular sovereignty and argued that the doctrine of majority rule was, in reality, a perversion of the American tradition. They held representative government, with its many checks and balances on the whims of the majority, rather than numerical democracy, to be the true genius of the American system and saw in a strict constitutionalism the sole safeguard against the degradation of mass rule. These scholars rejected totally the Jeffersonian and Transcendentalist faith in the intuitive wisdom of the people; they often approached outright elitism in their distaste for popular sovereignty. Most however, simply castigated the Jacksonians personally for their sins, and left the deeper questions of the nature and weaknesses of democracy unasked and unanswered. Like the Whigs of the 1840's, they were too deeply steeped in the dominant democratic faith to challenge directly the premise that the people

should rule, however distasteful they might find certain consequences of their sovereignty. Often they solved this dilemma by denying, as had the Whigs, that Jackson and his movement embodied the popular will at all; rather, they charged the Jacksonians with betrayal of the popular trust. "Jacksonian despotism" was their favorite phrase. But this use of terminology only partially concealed their deeper misgivings.

CHAPTER IV

JACKSONIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1890-1945

In 1919 Dr. William F. Dodd, prominent Chicago historian and political leader, charged the American historical profession with infidelity to the nation's democratic tradition. In a letter to Chief Justice Walter Clark, Dodd concluded that American historians had been unable to view the American past with any sympathetic understanding of the democratic aspirations and struggles of the common people. "Why," he asked, "cannot historians see things from the people's point of view?" To many scholars of the twentieth century, Dodd included, the hostile portrayal of Jacksonian Democracy to be found in the works of the historians of earlier decades was a prime case in point. Indeed, Dodd's lament was reminiscent of the protest of a lesser known historian of Jackson, Charles H. Peck, who in 1899 had complained that the historiography of the nineteenth century had been dominated by men "who were under the sway of the Whiggish culture of the country." The passage of time has not diminished the validity of this judgment; in 1958, a prominent historian of the Jacksonian era declared of nineteenth century scholarship: "These writers, in effect, stamped the fulminations of Jackson's political enemies with the cachet of scholarly authority." As the foregoing chapter of this study indicates, a detailed analysis of the Jacksonian historiography of the Gilded Age only serves to reinforce this conclusion. In general, nineteenth century

scholars were almost totally out of sympathy with both the spirit and the tone of the Jacksonian Democracy.¹

But if the scholars of the nineteenth century tended to accept uncritically the Whig version of the party battles of the era, balking only at acceptance of the Whig rejection of laissez faire, their counterparts of the first half of the twentieth century were often equally uncritical in their acceptance of the Jacksonian claim to stand for the principle of popular rule. The Jacksonian definition of their historical role as the defenders of the people against those who would deprive them of their political and economic rights, though never accorded the uncritical acceptance given the Whig interpretation by historians of the Gilded Age, nonetheless enjoyed great currency among the nation's scholars.

The first stirrings of revisionism occurred during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Politically, the 1890's witnessed a new upsurge of the democratic spirit in American political life. Driven by economic distress, millions of voters abandoned the conservative leaders of the '70's and '80's and cried for a new political movement sympathetic to their plight. The Populist party, avowedly egalitarian, filled respectable politicians of both major political parties with fear and trembling by its radical demands for economic justice and for sweeping extensions of the principle of popular rule. The great depression of 1892 sounded the death knell for conservative leadership within the Democratic party. The convention of 1896

¹Merle Curti, Probing Our Past (New York, 1955), p. 10; Charles H. Peck, The Jacksonian Epoch (New York, 1899), p. 328; Charles Greer Sellers, "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV (March, 1958), 616.

repudiated the hard money policies of Grover Cleveland and named William Jennings Bryan, a young Nebraska agrarian, a standard bearer in a thunderous campaign against privilege and monopoly strikingly reminiscent of Old Hickory's crusade against the Monster Bank and Money Monopoly.

The social ferment which, on the political level, produced Populism and the Free Silver Campaign, was by no means without repercussions in the scholarly world. Richard T. Dly, Simon Patten and Henry George continued to assail the conservative economic tradition, as they had in earlier decades, and their heresies now gained a more appreciative hearing. Lester Ward challenged the Social Darwinism of Spencer and Sumner. Thorstein Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class, published at the close of the century, contested the right of the wealthy to pose as the creators and supporters of civilization and exposed their alleged contempt for productive labor, their conspicuous consumption and their social and economic parasitism. The novels of Harlin Garland flaunted the Genteel Tradition in literature and portrayed vividly the sufferings of the agrarian poor. Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward painted an appealing portrait of a utopian society freed of poverty, misery, suffering and capitalism. Out of the economic sufferings of the '90's came new intellectual stirrings, not the least of which was a rebirth of faith in the democratic tradition.²

To some extent, this renewed belief in democracy was strengthened by the renewed nationalistic sentiment which also swept late nineteenth century America. By the time of the imperialist

²Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York, 1899); Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward (Boston, 1888).

venture of 1898, "Democracy" as an object of word worship had attained virtually the status of a national cult. Even scholars, rather immune to its appeal during the Gilded Age, were caught up in the new spirit.³

In a decade of democratic ferment, when Republican and Democratic politicians alike chanted with renewed vigor to old slogans and vied in paying homage to "democracy," the genteel, aloof, patrician historical writing of a Schouler or a Schurz seemed strangely incongruous. More in keeping with the spirit and mood of the times was a paper read at the convention of the American Historical Association in the depression year of 1893, by an obscure young professor from the University of Wisconsin, Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner's paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which attracted little attention in the year of its presentation, is now regarded as one of the great landmarks in American historical thought. Probably no other essay has ever exerted so profound an influence on the profession. Turner's explanation of American development soon came to overshadow all other interpretations of the American past and has been subjected to thoroughgoing criticism and revision only within the last three decades.⁴

While conservative historians, such as Turner's former teacher, Herbert Baxter Adams, thought that American institutions originated in

³Julius W. Pratt, The Expansionists of 1898 (New York, 1936); Walter Millis, The Martial Spirit (New York, 1931); Marcus W. Vilkerson, Public Opinion and the Spanish American War (New York, 1932); Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York, 1955), pp. 81-93.

⁴Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," The Turner Thesis concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History, ed. George Rogers Taylor (Boston, 1956), pp. 1-18; Gene M. Gressley, "The Turner Thesis--A Problem In Historiography," Agricultural History, XXXII (October, 1958), 227.

Europe and evolved slowly through the course of centuries, Turner advanced a thesis which emphasized the unique and distinctive nature of American democracy. Adams' findings had been most compatible with the Social Darwinist theory of social evolution. In his view, American institutions originated in the tribal customs of the Teutonic tribes, were transplanted to England by the Anglo-Saxons, and, evolving slowly, finally came to maturity on the Atlantic seaboard of the United States. Adams asserted that the "seeds" of democracy passed through logical, preordained stages of development that could not be altered or accelerated by human intervention without incurring the most disastrous of consequences. His determinism offered no encouragement to social reformers and radicals who would shape society anew in the image of their innermost ideals. It reassured those who believed in stability, permanence, and law, just as it implicitly condemned those who would set class against class.⁵

Though Turner, a son of the Wisconsin frontier and an heir of the Jacksonian tradition, accepted many of Adams' premises of social evolution, he found certain aspects of his explanation of American evolution most unsatisfactory. As a Westerner and a democrat, the young Wisconsin professor felt that Adams and others of the "Teutonic Origins" school had ignored the role played by the frontier in the forging of the nation's uniquely democratic institutions. In his frontier essay, Turner declared:

⁵John H. Randall, Jr. and George Haines IV, "Controlling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians," Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography, Social Science Research Council Bulletin No. 64 (New York, 1946), pp. 17-52; Herbert Baxter Adams, "Germanic Origins of New England Towns," The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (Baltimore, 1883), I, 5-38.

Up to our own day American history has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement Westward, explain American development.

Behind institutions, behind institutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people--to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing in each area of this frontier progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexities of city life . . . the true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast; it is the great West . . . too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to the Germanic origins, too little to American factors.

To Turner, American Democracy did not have its origins in the wilderness of Medieval Germany; rather it emerged "stark, strong and full of life from the American forest."⁶

In the Western frontier the Wisconsin professor found the birthplace both of American nationalism and of America's uniquely democratic institutions. Of the latter, Turner wrote:

. . . frontier individualism has from the beginning prompted democracy. The frontier states that came into the union in the first quarter of a century of its existence came in with democratic suffrage provisions, and had reactive effects of the highest importance upon the older states whose people were being attracted there . . . it was western New York that forced an extension of suffrage in the constitutional conventions of that state in 1821, and it was western Virginia that compelled the tidewater region to put a more liberal suffrage provision in the constitution framed in 1830.

Turner was by no means uncritical of the Western democracy; he deplored what he termed the "evil element" of frontier life. Frontier conditions he wrote bred "lax business honor, inflated paper currency, and

⁶Constance Skinner (ed.), "Turner's Autobiographic Letter," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XIX, 101-102; Taylor, The Turner Thesis, pp. 1-2; Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier In American History (New York, 1920), p. 216.

wild cat banking." Thinking perhaps of the Populist movement of his own day, which he largely rejected, Turner declared that frontier individualism at times could exert a pernicious influence in American life. Like the other historians of his day, he deplored that "laxity in regard to government affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit."⁷

But these aspects of Western political life appeared to Turner mere minor blemishes when weighed against the West's great contribution to the nation and to the world, Democracy and Opportunity. "Western democracy," he wrote in an essay published in 1903, "has been from the very time of its birth idealistic. The very fact of the wilderness appealed to men as a fair blank page on which to write a new chapter in the story of man's struggle for a higher type society . . . to the peasant and artisan of the old world, bound by the chains of social class, as old as custom and as inevitable as fate, the West offered an exit into a free life and a greater well-being among the bounties of nature, into the midst of resources that demanded manly exertion, and that gave in return the chance for indefinite ascent in the scale of social advance. Again Turner affirmed, "American democracy is fundamentally the outcome of the experiences of the American people in dealing with the West."⁸

Though the full implications of the Turner thesis to Jacksonian historiography were not really made fully evident until a few years

⁷Taylor, The Turner Thesis, pp. 14-15.

⁸Turner, The Frontier In American History, p. 29.

after the close of the nineteenth century, this provocative new interpretation of the American past clearly contained the seeds of a potential revolution in the traditional interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. If the West was indeed the birthplace of all that was uniquely American in our heritage, then Andrew Jackson, the greatest of the frontiersmen, and those who followed his leadership, could no longer be regarded as the corrupters of the Republic.

The first to utilize the frontier essay in the explanation of Jacksonian Democracy was Turner himself. The Frontier essay of 1893 mentioned Jackson briefly as the herald of "democracy as an effective force" and of "the triumph of the frontier." In the 1903 essay, Turner elaborated upon this theme:

Of this frontier democracy which now took possession of the nation Andrew Jackson was the very personification . . . At last the frontier in the person of its typical man had found a place in government. This six-foot backwoodsman, with blue eyes that could blaze on occasion, this choleric, impetuous self-willed Scotch-Irish leader of men, this expert duelist and ready fighter, this embodiment of the tenacious, vehement, personal West was in politics to stay. The frontier democracy of that time had the instincts of the clansman in the days of Scotch border warfare. Vehement and tenacious as the democracy was, strenuously as each man contended with his neighbor for the spoils of the new country that opened up before them, they all had respect for the man who best represented their aspirations and their ideals. . . . He had the essential traits of the Kentucky and Tennessee frontier. It was a frontier free from the influence of European ideas and institutions. The men of the Western world turned their backs upon the Atlantic ocean, and with a grim energy and self-reliance began to build up a society free from the dominance of ancient forms.⁹

All aspects of Jackson's administration, the attack upon the Bank, the President's cavalier disregard for the niceties of Constitutional law, opposition to nullification, the emergence of the spoils system, appeared to Turner but a logical reflection of the rugged

⁹Taylor, The Turner Thesis, p. 15.

democracy of the frontier, with its intense dislike for the bondage of "ancient forms":

In his assault upon the Bank as an engine of aristocracy, and in his denunciation of nullification, Jackson went directly to his object with the ruthless energy of a frontiersman. For formal law and the subtleties of state sovereignty he had the contempt of a backwoodsman. Nor is it without significance that this typical man of the new democracy will always be associated with the triumph of the spoils system in national politics. To the new democracy of the West, office was an opportunity to exercise natural rights as an equal citizen of the community. Rotation in office served not simply to allow the successful man to punish his enemies and to reward his friends but it also furnished the training in the actual conduct of political affairs which every American claimed as his birthright.

Turner did not share that aversion to the innovations of Jacksonian Democracy expressed by earlier historians. Indeed, he regarded the movement as a dynamic, invigorating, nationalizing force in American political life. In the Jacksonian movement, democracy in America came to fruition. Even though Turner rejected the spoils system of his own day, he hastened to add:

In a primitive democracy of the type of the United States in 1830 such a system could exist without the ruin of the State. National government in that period was no complex and nicely adjusted machine, and the evils of the system were long in making themselves fully apparent.¹⁰

Turner made little effort to disguise his affection and admiration for Andrew Jackson, "that fierce Tennessee spirit who broke down the traditions of conservative rule, swept away the privacies and privileges of officialdom, and, like a Gothic leader, opened the temple of the nation to the populace." In the pages of this scholarly grandson of a Jacksonian frontiersman, Old Hickory found a new defender.¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹Ibid., p. 25.

Turner's interpretation of the Jacksonian movement placed primary emphasis upon the role of the frontier democracy in giving impetus and direction to the crusade of popular rule. Turner was, however, also aware of the influence of Eastern labor, declaring in an essay published in 1905, that during Jackson's administration "the labor population of the cities began to assert its power and its determination to share in government." He did not, however, develop this theme, which remained largely ignored for several decades.¹²

A strong note of nostalgia for the past may be discerned in Turner's writings. Turner's democratic idealism recoiled at the undercurrent of class antagonism present in his own generation. He wrote longingly of a frontier democracy of the past in which "classes and inequalities of fortune played little part." Never really at home in the industrial world of the twentieth century, Turner in his writings betrayed a profound longing for that distant time when an abundance of free land made it impossible "for the successful . . . to harden their triumphs into a privileged class." Just as Orestes Brownson and John Comenfort some decades earlier had expressed their fears concerning the implications to the future of democracy of the gradual disappearance of the frontier, so Turner, writing at a time when the frontier had seemingly disappeared, ended his frontier essay with a veiled expression of anxiety. If the frontier had made democracy possible by providing a "safety valve" for the oppressed and the discontented of the industrial East, the sustenance of the democratic ideal in a society no longer blessed by this salutary influence

¹²Turner, The Frontier in American History, p. 24.

would prove no easy task. Turner sought an answer to the problems posed by the frontier's disappearance through involvement in the Progressive movement. However, he never really resolved fully the dilemma which his thesis posed. Though Turner may have been unaware of their forebodings, this anxiety had first been posed by the more radical of the Jacksonian thinkers decades earlier. In their thought, it had also remained unresolved.¹³

In his later writings, Turner gave primary emphasis to the role of sectional conflict in shaping the course of American history. In his interpretation, the Western states, bastions of Jacksonian Democracy, characterized by the exuberant optimistic egalitarianism of the frontier, were a democratizing force in the nation's political life. The manufacturing East and the slave holding South Atlantic, on the other hand, acted as conservative breaks on the onward march of democracy. In Turner's posthumous The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and Its Sections, this interpretation of the Jacksonian movement was given its fullest expression. The election of Jackson, Turner declared, "meant that an agricultural society, strongest in the regions of rural isolation rather than in the areas of greater density of population and of greater wealth, had triumphed over the conservative, industrial, commercial and manufacturing society of the New England type. It meant that a new, aggressive, expansive democracy, emphasizing human rights and individualism, as against the old established order which emphasized vested rights and corporate action, had come into control." Despite its temporary alliance with the planter

¹³ Ibid., pp. 302-303.

interests of the Deep South in 1828, Turner argued that the Jacksonian movement essentially had as little in common with the deep-seated conservatism of the spokesmen of the slavocracy as with the emergent Eastern industrial interests. The egalitarian ideals of the West as symbolized in Andrew Jackson, "the personification of Western wishes and Western will," were in reality in conflict with those of the seaboard Southern states who out of expediency supported the party of Jackson. The great democratizing mission of the Jacksonians, to Turner, had its origins almost exclusively in the hearty democracy of the Western frontier.¹⁴

Whatever the outcome of the current controversy concerning the validity of Turner's concept of the West as the birthplace of democracy, his place as the guiding spirit of the twentieth century renaissance of the democratic interpretation of the American past is secure. Through his inspiration a whole generation of American historians directed themselves to the writing of a more sympathetic account of the popular struggle for democracy than that provided by the conservative, Eastern oriented historiography of Sumner, Schurz and Schouler.

One of the first works to reflect Turner's celebration of the frontier Democracy of Jackson was Woodrow Wilson's Division and Reunion published in 1893, the year of Turner's memorable address to the American Historical Association. Turner had expounded his frontier thesis to the young Wilson some years earlier, while both were graduate students at the Johns Hopkins University. That Wilson found Turner's conception most attractive is at once evident from a cursory reading of

¹⁴Frederick Jackson Turner, The United States, 1830-1850 (New York, 1935), pp. 36, 381, 383-384, 386.

Division and Reunion.

Wilson, like Turner, explained the Jacksonian movement as a liberal, egalitarian upsurge rooted in the rough and vigorous democracy of the West. A romantic nationalist of Southern antecedents, he placed special emphasis upon Jacksonian Democracy as a nationalising force in the nation's political life. Old Hickory, to Wilson as to Turner, symbolized the vigor and dynamism of the frontier democracy: "A man . . . cast in the mould of the men of daring, sagacity, and resource who were winning the western wilderness for civilization, but who were themselves impatient of the very forces of order and authority in whose interest they were heaving roads and making clearings. He impersonated the agencies which were to nationalize the government. These agencies may be summarily indicated in two words: The West. They were the agencies of arder and muscle, without sensibility or caution. Timid people might well look on them askance. They undoubtedly racked the nicely adjusted framework of the government almost to the point of breaking. No wonder that conservative people were alienated who had never before seen things done so strenuously or passionately. But they were forces of health, hasty because young, possessing the sound but insensitive conscience which belongs to those who are always confident in action." In the Jacksonian movement, Wilson perceived a healthy, dynamically nationalistic democracy which transcended the narrow barriers of sectional prejudice and fused the nation into a united whole. It accorded well with his own splendid vision of an American nationalism grounded in the highest democratic idealism.¹⁵

¹⁵Woodrow Wilson, Division and Reunion (New York, 1929), pp. 24-26; Michael Kraus, The Writing of American History (Norman, 1953), p. 458.

But though Wilson celebrated Jacksonian Democracy as a vague, liberal nationalistic force in American political life, on many of the specific issues of the Jacksonian period he adhered rather closely to the anti-Jacksonian interpretations advanced by Whig partisans and by contemporary conservative historians. Thus, he wrote of Andrew Jackson's "intense narrowness" and condemned the Jacksonian "Kitchen Cabinet" for effecting "that combination between national policy and party management which has ever since been the bane and reproach of American politics." The spoils system he labeled a "pernicious" corruption of the civil service, "both demoralizing and corrupt," and, unlike Turner, he left this judgment unmitigated. Like Turner, he found the fondness for paper money inflation of the debtor classes which supported Jackson, most distasteful.

In Wilson's judgment, the Bank of the United States had performed a useful and necessary function in restraining the excessive note issues of local banks. Its termination, leaving the nation without any adequate control over the currency, he deemed most unfortunate. The Jacksonian charges against that institution he termed "notoriously without reasonable foundation."

In common with most contemporary historians, however, Wilson did not regard the Bank's destruction an unmitigated misfortune:

Whatever may be said of Jackson's charges against the Bank of the United States, or of his methods of effecting its ruin, it was probably a wise instinct that led him to destroy it. The country was on the eve of a great industrial development, when business was to enter upon a period of unparalleled expansion, and when a new force of speculative adventure was to hurry men beyond all rational reckonings. In such a period, with an atmosphere, when prudence could scarcely anywhere keep its head, it would have been indeed perilous to leave so great,

so dominating a financial power in the hands of a great private corporation like the Bank of the United States.¹⁶

Wilson thus fully accepted much of the Jacksonian argument against the Bank. Even though rejecting specific Jacksonian charges against Biddle and his institution, their violation of the Constitution, corrupt involvement in politics, etc., he regarded the second Bank as potentially dangerous to the stability of the economy and the well-being of the nation, protesting against the concentration of economic power in the hands of the few. Even in 1893, one perceives in Wilson the inveterate advocate of trust busting and free competition. But he continued:

On the other hand, however, it could do nothing but harm to destroy such an institution suddenly, with an ignorant and almost brutal disregard of the damage that would thereby be done to the delicate fabric of commercial credit. If it was the right thing to do, Jackson did it in the worst possible way. The effect of it was to produce at once and of a sudden and to leave without a check or guidance of any kind, the very madness of speculation and of bubble banking that the great presiding bank might in some measure have moderated and restrained.

Wilson indicated his approval of governmental control and regulation of the currency, writing in his Division and Reunion of the "follies and disasters of unregulated banking." Two decades later, his presidential administration was to witness the establishment of the Federal Reserve System.¹⁷

If the writings of Wilson and Turner glorified the vigorous frontier democracy of the West, the works of other scholars of their generation praised the political genius of Old Hickory and his followers. Breaking drastically with the genteel patrician distaste for politics which had characterized the historiography of the Gilded

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 29-30, 77-95.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 90.

Age, John W. Burgess, in his study of The Middle Period, published in 1897, lauded Jackson's strengthening of the federal executive. Contesting Hermann von Holst's assertion of the unconstitutionality of the Bank veto, Burgess wrote:

Instead of destroying the Constitution in theory by the doctrine of their veto, the President did something to rescue the check and balance system of government, provided by the Constitution, from the threatened domination of a single department . . . the encroaching legislature was fast developing the principle of parliamentary government as the principle of the American system, while the Constitution provides the principle of executive independence and presidential administration. . . . The President's Bank veto called a halt in these tendencies and exerted an influence for the restoration of executive independence and of the "check and balance" system provided in the Constitution, and it called the people into a closer and more immediate relation to the President than they had before occupied, in that the President now appealed to them to decide the question between him and the Congress. . . .

Burgess, a political conservative who labeled Andrew Jackson "the noblest Roman of them all," advanced an interpretation of the presidential office which, with a few modifications of style, might easily have come from the mouth of the impassioned Jacksonian Thomas Hart Benton. His endorsement of both the principle of popular rule and of the Jacksonian conception of the presidency signaled the demise of the constitutional doctrines of Clay and the Whig party, doctrines which, but a few years earlier, had generally received the uncritical approbation of the nation's scholars.¹⁸

Burgess' interpretation of the constitutional questions of the Jacksonian years is all the more striking in that his treatment of the other important aspects of the Jacksonian era reflected a rather

¹⁸John W. Burgess, The Middle Period (New York, 1897), pp. 135, 197-198, 207-208, 278-289; Reminiscences of an American Scholar (New York, 1934).

shown by reason to the Jacksonian cause. He was prone to hint that Jacksonian financial policies smacked of "socialism." A nationalist of Hamiltonian persuasion, he wrote, disapprovingly, that the election of Jackson in 1828 signaled the triumph of a "states rights democracy" hostile to centralized power, Jackson's own nationalistic proclivities notwithstanding. A critic of mass democracy, Burgess, in the language of the Gilded Age historian, lamented the passage of government by the "qualified" and "able."¹⁹

Despite the anti-Jacksonian tone of his historical writings, Burgess was rather profoundly influenced by the frontier thesis. of the West, he wrote: "It was the settlement of the country west of the Alleghenies which first created social conditions in harmony with the democratic theory . . . of the divisions within the Jacksonian party, the Western Division alone was a real democracy." Burgess' treatment of the Western democracy was, however, much less sympathetic than Turner's. Conservative to the core, the Columbia historian found himself totally out of sympathy with the political and social "radicalism" of the West. At no time, however, did Burgess venture a frontal attack on the "democratic theory," itself comparable to that advanced by Sumner and von Holst two decades earlier. Rather, he resorted to the use of the scare word "socialism"--a term he never defined--in his castigation of Western political tendencies. That a leading spokesman for the conservative interpretation of the Jacksonian era should carefully avoid direct criticism of the Jacksonian conception of majority rule is a striking indication of the increasing acceptance of

¹⁹Burgess, Middle Period, pp. 134, 144, 164, 194-195.

the "growth of Democracy" as the grand theme of American history.²⁰

The acceptance of that theme led finally to a revision of the standard interpretation of the Jacksonian spoils system and its influence in American political life. With the publication of Carl Russell Fish's monograph, The Civil Service and the Patronage in 1905, scholars came to grant their approbation to the Jacksonian, rather than the Whig interpretation, of rotation in office. In sharp contrast to the position assumed by the dominant patrician school which regarded the spoils system as an innovation of unmitigated iniquity, Fish, professor of American History at the University of Wisconsin, argued that the use of public office as a party device was historically essential to the emergence of a truly democratic political system. In his judgment, only through party organization could the hold of the aristocratic elite over the public service be broken and popular sovereignty be realized. Though eschewing the more lurid Jacksonian visions of an office holder's conspiracy against republican government, Fish in effect, accepted the burden of their defense of Old Hickory's removal policy. He further amplified that defense into an argument for the necessity of party organization in democratic government:

If the majority is to mould the policy of the party, if the demos is to be kept constantly awake and brought out to vote after the excitement of the hour has passed away, it is necessary that the party be organized. There must be drilling and training, hard work with the awkward squad, and occasional dress parade.

This work requires the labor of many men; there must be captains of the hundreds and captains of the tens, district chiefs and ward heelers. Now, some men may labor for love and some for glory, but glory comes only to the leaders of the ten thousands--to the very few--it cannot serve as a general inducement and event those who love must live. It is an essential

²⁰Ibid., pp. 165, 194-195.

idea of democracy that these leaders shall be of the people; they must not be gentlemen of wealth and leisure, but they must--the mass of them at any rate--belong to the class that makes its own living. If, then, they are to devote their time to politics, politics must be made to pay. It is here that the function of the spoils system becomes evident; the civil service becomes the pay-roll of the party leader; offices are apportioned according to the rank and merits of his subordinates, and, if duties are too heavy or new positions are needed, new offices may be created. To apply these facts to America, the spoils system paid for the party organization which enabled the democracy of Pennsylvania to rule after 1800 and which established a "government of the people" in the United States after 1829.

Fish, analyzing the statistical evidence available, argued that the opponents of Jackson--and those historians who accepted uncritically their partisan fulminations--had greatly exaggerated the number of removals during the Jacksonian years. Even so, he was sensitive to the abuses which followed the advent of spoils politics. His final conclusion however, was that, sordid though the spoils system may have been in actual operation, its use was nonetheless essential to the creation of a true democracy in America:

The armor in which democracy won its early victories in this country, and to which it still clings in great part may now seem crude and heavy to the wearer, but we should not forget that at the time of its introduction it was the very best that had been devised; that by it, for the first time in history, a numerous and very widely scattered people was enabled itself to direct its whole force to its own advancement; and present appreciation of the evils of the spoils system should not blind us to the fact that in the period of its establishment it served a purpose that could probably have been performed in no other way and was fully worth the cost.²¹

Twenty-two years after the publication of The Civil Service and the Patronage, Fish undertook a social history of the Jacksonian era, The Rise of the Common Man, published as a part of the History of

²¹Carl Russell Fish, The Civil Service and the Patronage (New York, 1905), pp. 156-157.

American Life series, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox. Celebrating the dynamism, the idealism and the creativity of the Jacksonian years, the Wisconsin historian argued that the Jacksonian influence in American life represented, not merely a general lowering of standards among the higher classes and a consequent triumph of mediocrity, as Gilded Age historians had held, but a simultaneous "leveling upwards," a pervasive improvement in the level and tone of American life. Even so, Fish betrayed a certain uneasiness as to the ultimate implications of the Jacksonian cult of the common man. Contrasting Andrew Jackson and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fish wrote: "The ultimate tendency of Jackson's view would have been to a dull effort by a satisfied sameness. Equality to Emerson was the result of striving." Though Fish shared fully the Jacksonian distaste for elitism and regarded the triumph of Jackson as the triumph of the people over the aristocracy, he was clearly relieved that the Jacksonian conception of equality was never fully realized.²²

In common with the majority of the historical scholars of his generation, Fish, in his analysis of the origins of the Jacksonian movement embraced the Turner thesis. In The Rise of the Common Man he wrote of the inhabitants of the West whose support elevated Andrew Jackson to the presidency: "Not by numbers alone . . . but by their crude embodiment of the spirit of the age they prepared to lead the country. Their partial success marks the first case in history of a nation dominated by a frontier population."²³

²²Carl Russell Fish, The Rise of the Common Man (New York, 1927), pp. xvii, ix, 1, 4, 9, 11, 21, 41-42, 45-50, 52, 164, 169, 172.

²³Ibid., pp. 30-31.

Equally reminiscent of Turner's interpretation of the Jacksonian movement was the analysis offered in the Life of Thomas Hart Benton published in 1904 by William M. Meigs, Philadelphia lawyer and scholarly grandson of a Jacksonian politician. In his frankly laudatory biography of Benton, whom he considered a greater statesman than Clay, Webster or Calhoun, Meigs wrote of the "bold and boastful democracy of the West," an area "whose influence upon our development came to be enormous, but which has been, unfortunately, far too little studied." Highly critical of the anti-Jacksonian historical writing of the previous generation, Meigs sought to vindicate the course followed by Jackson's partisans on the vital issues of their day. Meigs dismissed the spoils system, the focal issue of the Jacksonian era to many historians, in a single sentence. Though granting that political removals were unfortunate, he found them also "unavoidable" and justified the Jacksonian policy by an appeal to the demands of practical politics.²⁴

Of the Bank question, to which he devoted a large portion of his narrative, Meigs sought to justify Benton's fervid support of the Jacksonian crusade against Biddle's institution. Of the "monied monster" he wrote, in true Jacksonian terms, "its vast centralized power, capable of springing into instant action from one end of the country to the other upon the mere order of central governing power, and thus sure to exert a stupendous influence upon the lives and fortunes of many thousands, was a serious menace to the proper growth of our institutions." Deprecating the judgment of those who charged Jackson and Benton with "abysmal ignorance of finance" Meigs sought

²⁴William M. Meigs, The Life of Thomas Hart Benton (Philadelphia, 1904), pp. 3-4, 184.

to demonstrate that the "instinctive" Jacksonian fears of the "money power" were most justifiable. In doing so, he accepted all but the more far fetched Jacksonian charges against the Bank.²⁵

Taking cognizance of the opposition of much of the mercantile community to the Jacksonian cause, Meigs, writing in the midst of the Progressive period, noted with satisfaction that Benton "was by no means among those who think that the propertied classes are always right." Yet, lest this be construed as an endorsement of radicalism, Meigs also dutifully praised Benton for his firm opposition to the "socialistic tendencies of his day." These, should the reader wonder, were best exemplified by those who wrongly held that the federal government should control Indian trading posts. Approvingly, Meigs declared that Benton throughout his career had "courageously" insisted that "the federal government should get out of business operations," Though Meigs was a firm defender of the Jacksonian Democracy as he conceived it, his conception of that movement, which emphasized political democracy and laissez faire, could hardly cause the most inveterate conservative of his day undue alarm.²⁶

Another biographer to enlist in the ranks of the Jacksonians was Augustus C. Buell, a civil engineer and sometime journalist, who described himself as a "Jacksonian by heredity." Buell boasted that both his grandparents had voted for Old Hickory. He regarded the Jacksonian movement as the culmination of the nation's evolution towards true democracy, and accepted that Jacksonian interpretation of the

²⁵Ibid., pp. 272-275.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 473-474.

party battles of the era which ascribed to the Whig opposition aristocratic hostility to the rule of the people. Writing in his History of Andrew Jackson of the "Jacksonian revolution" Buell declared:

The old system that came to an abrupt end in 1829 involved the cardinal theory that only a very small, select and self-perpetuating class of men were fit to transact the business of the government, while the rest of the people, the uncounted majority, were fit only to pay taxes for their support. This theory was un-Republican, un-Democratic, oligarchical, almost feudal and of course it had to go. Its further perpetuity would give the lie to the progress of the nation.

Buell, like Fish and Meigs, justified the spoils system as essential to the assurance of the triumph of democracy. Accepting the charges of the partisans of Old Hickory regarding a conspiracy of self-styled office-holding aristocrats intent upon perpetuating their own power, Buell declared that under Adams the civil service was "aristocratic and had already begun to be hereditary. It belonged to the epoch of apostolic succession of cabinet officers to the presidency, the oligarchy of the congressional caucus and of restricted suffrage." Writing that the "arrogance of the clerks had grown with their sense of security in place from one administration to another," Buell concluded that since government officials under Adams had ceased "to consider themselves servants to the people," widespread removals were essential to the preservation of popular rule. However, he also argued that Jackson's opponents greatly exaggerated the scope of his removals.²⁷

Buell, who dedicated his History of Andrew Jackson to Theodore Roosevelt, regarded Old Hickory as the architect of the modern party

²⁷Augustus C. Buell, History of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1904), II, 181-185, 191, 212-218, 260-263. There is some evidence to indicate that Buell fabricated many of his sources. See Melton W. Hamilton, "Augustus C. Buell, Fraudulent Historian," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXX (October, 1956), 478-492.

system and praised his political genius and firm executive leadership. Unlike most other interpreters, who have regarded Van Buren as the masterful political organizer of the Jackson era, Buell relegated the New York Regency leader to a position of secondary importance. Jackson, he argued, had created a political machine in Tennessee in the early 1820's incomparable in its cold efficiency. After becoming "Boss of Tennessee" (the term is Buell's), Old Hickory by 1826 had extended his "machine" throughout the nation, thereby laying the groundwork for the modern Democratic party organization. Buell offered little documentation to support this rather odd interpretation.²⁸

In his narrative of the Bank controversy, Buell expressed doubt as to the validity of many of the charges raised by Jackson and his partisans against Biddle's institution and criticized the removal of the deposits as a violation of the government's "contract" with the Bank. However, in general he was in sympathy with the Jacksonian position. Pronouncing the Bank war a contest "between President Jackson and Emperor Nicholas," Buell concluded that Jackson was right on the general principle that the government should not "permanently bestow the benefit of its financial power upon any chartered monopoly devised for the enrichment of a select and limited few."²⁹

Somewhat less sympathy for the Jacksonian cause is to be found in the pages of Professor John Spencer Bassett's two volume Life of Andrew Jackson, first published in 1911. Bassett's work, the first major biography of Jackson to come from the pen of an American historian

²⁸Buell, II, 181-185, 260-263.

²⁹Ibid., II, 254, 316.

since the publication of Sumner's Andrew Jackson As a Public Man, in 1894, followed both Sumner and Turner in finding the source of Jacksonian egalitarian idealism in the Western frontier. Occasionally Bassett alluded to the existence of class cleavages in the political parties of the Jackson era. For example, he found that "the mercantile class and men of wealth in general" rather consistently opposed the Jacksonian movement. But Bassett, a North Carolinian by birth, made the conflict of sections and the dominant influence of the West the major theme of his interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. The triumph of Jacksonian Democracy, to Bassett, symbolized the triumph of the values of the Western frontier. Jackson, he wrote, "voiced the thought of the frontier, which happened to be the average thought of the older parts of America . . . his Western ideals were for him the only ideals. They gave him his battle cry, which, when once uttered, found support in the hearts of average Americans everywhere. And this was the secret of the Jacksonian movement."³⁰

Though by no means sharing the Gilded Age historians' revulsion in the face of mass democracy, Bassett was not without some misgivings concerning some aspects of the rule of the "average man." Though praising the courage, the honesty and the vigorous presidential leadership of Andrew Jackson--who, in his judgment, personified both the virtues and the weaknesses of the typical American of his generation, Bassett was most distressed by Old Hickory's alleged narrowness, ignorance, naivete and provincialism. He found Jackson a "man of passion," one whose political views "were formed through feeling rather

³⁰John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1935), pp. ix, 421, 589, 622.

than intellect." He deplored the "superficiality" of Jackson's "ideas of finance" and found Biddle's position on banking questions far sounder than that held by the partisans of Old Hickory. Biddle's efforts to convince the nation of the need for re-chartering the Bank of the United States Bassett labeled a "task of enlightenment." Jackson's veto message, on the other hand, he found characterized by "loose illogic." Of the Jacksonian crusade against the Bank, Bassett concluded: "The courage of the anti-bank men was admirable, their generalship was excellent, but their methods were not always commendable. Prejudice, ignorance and selfishness abounded rather more than on the other side."³¹

Even so, however, Bassett, endorsing the basic Jacksonian position on the party battles of the period, wrote with obvious approbation that under Old Hickory's vigorous leadership of the nation "the tendency to aristocratic institutions in the hands of conservative republicans was replaced by a vigorous and well-organized democratic party." Frequently praising the Jacksonians for their genius in political organization, Bassett even conceded that the spoils system, which he regarded as basically pernicious, was but a natural expression of the Jacksonian quest for a truly democratic political system. He granted that quest his essential approval. Of Andrew Jackson and his movement, Bassett concluded:

The American who now knows how to estimate the life of the Jacksonian era will take something from the pretensions of his enemies and add something to the virtues hitherto accorded his partisans. Jackson's lack of education, his crude judgments in many affairs, his occasional outbreaks of passion, his habitual hatred of those enemies with whom he

³¹Ibid., 408, 421, 483.

had not made friends for party purposes, and his crude ideas of some political policies--all lose some of their infelicity in the face of his brave, frank, masterly leadership of the democratic movement which then established itself in our life.

Though Bassett praised that democratic movement, he offered no reasoned philosophical defense of majoritarian democracy. To Bassett, as to Jackson, democracy was a matter not of the intellect but of the emotion, of intuition, not reason. In that he but echoed the almost universal acceptance of the democratic creed which had come to characterize the writing of American history. The irreverent criticisms of Sumner and von Holst were now accorded little currency.³²

Even more fervid than Bassett in his basic Jacksonian partisanship was Professor William E. Dodd of the University of Chicago. Dodd, a lifelong Democrat who served as American Ambassador to Germany in the 1930's, gave full credence to the Jacksonian conception of their mission as a crusade against aristocracy and anti-republican hostility to popular rule. Characterizing the opponents of Old Hickory as those who feared the rough ways of plain men, the ideals of equality and popular initiative so dear to the American heart, Dodd regarded Andrew Jackson as the heir and defender of the egalitarian heritage of Jefferson. Prior to 1828, he wrote, "the old Jeffersonian machine, organized as a popular protest against aristocracy and the money power, had itself become aristocratic, and had ceased to represent the democracy of the United States." Jackson, rallying the "social classes" which had supported Jefferson in 1800, revitalized the Jeffersonian ideal. With his election, Dodd wrote, "the people had come to power a second time." The party battles of the Jackson era reflected their

³²Ibid., p. 750.

determination to control government, despite the opposition of "strong willed aristocrats" such as Nicholas Biddle "who put little faith in popular elections and plebiscites." In true Jacksonian terms, Dodd glorified Andrew Jackson as their spokesman, proclaiming Old Hickory "the second American president who so understood his people he could interpret them and by intuition scent the course the popular mind would take."

In his analysis of the origins of the Jacksonian movement, Dodd echoed Turner's frontier thesis, declaring that it was the "great West, pulsating with life, and vigor, filled with hope for the future, at once democratic and imperialistic" which provided "the nucleus of the party of Jackson." Dodd's writings also reflected Turner's emphasis on sectional conflict in American history. In the introduction to Expansion and Conflict, Dodd declared that "the primary assumption of the author is that the people of this country did not compose a nation until the close of the Civil War in 1865. of scarcely less importance is the fact that the decisive motive behind the different groups in Congress at every great crisis under discussion was sectional advantage or even sectional aggrandisement." Despite his heavy emphasis on sectional factors in American history, Dodd, in his treatment of the Jacksonian years, wrote also of the alignment of "social classes," finding that in the Democratic crusade of the 1830's "the small farmers of the country districts and the artisan classes of the East accepted the leadership of the West and waged relentless war on the behalf of the "Old Hero." Dodd's perception of a class alignment in Jacksonian politics was by no means surprising. His conception of historical causation placed primary emphasis upon the role of economic interest in

shaping political action. "Public men," he wrote, "usually determine what line of procedure is best for their constituents, or for what are supposed to be the interests of their constituents, and then seek for powers or clauses in the Constitution which justify their pre-terminated course." He argued that "long winded speeches or tortuous decisions of courts" are of much less value than "the statistics of the cotton or tobacco crops, the reports of manufacturers and the conditions of the frontier, which determined more of the votes of members of Congress than the most eloquent persuasion of the great orators." Though Dodd regarded history largely in terms of conflict of economic interests, he conceived of this struggle in America as primarily of sections, not of classes. Though he commented on the tendency of the prosperous to gravitate to the Whig camp and characterized the Bank war as a struggle to prevent the "subordination of the country to one of its interests," class conflict was a secondary, not the dominant, theme of his interpretation of the Jacksonian era. Essentially, his view of the Jacksonian movement followed the conceptions of Frederick Jackson Turner.³³

Frederick Austin Ogg's The Reign of King Andrew, published in 1919 as a part of the volume, The Frontier In Politics, in the Chronicles of America series, edited by Allen Johnson, reflected both the new interpretation of the Turner school and the patrician, Whig oriented historiography of the Gilded Age. Of Jackson's election to the presidency, Ogg, a professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, declared: "The untrained, self-willed, passionate frontier

³³William E. Dodd, Expansion and Conflict (Boston, 1915), pp. v-vi, 1, 4, 9, 12, 15, 19, 21, 37, 78.

soldier came to power in 1828 as the standard bearer of a mighty democratic uprising which was destined before it ran its course to break down oligarchical party organizations, to liberalize state and local governments and to turn the stream of national politics into wholly new channels." Finding, with Turner, the source of the egalitarian democracy of the Jacksonian era in the Western frontier, and regarding the sectional conflict as the dynamic force of Jacksonian politics, Ogg's account of the Jacksonian years often echoed the interpretations of the Turner school. Though often critical of Old Hickory's alleged "irascibility, egotism, stubbornness and intolerance of the opinions of others," Ogg praised Jackson's democratic idealism. "He was not a statesman, yet some of the highest qualities of statesmanship were in him. He had a perception of the public will which has rarely been surpassed and in most, if not all, of the great issues of his time he had a grasp of the right side of the question."³⁴

In common with most of the historians of his day, Ogg lauded Jackson's firm use of the full powers of the presidential office. "In his vindication of executive independence Jackson broke new ground, crudely enough it is true; yet whatever the merits of his ideas at the moment they reshaped men's conception of the presidency and helped make that office the power it is today." He also accorded his praise to Jackson's fervent nationalism. "The strong stand taken against nullification clarified popular opinion upon the nature of the union and lent a new and powerful support to national vigor and dignity."³⁵

³⁴Frederick Austin Ogg, The Reign of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1919), pp. 114, 235-236.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 235-236.

Yet, on many other issues, Ogg gave full credence to many of the cruder Whig caricatures of Jackson and his movement. He wrote disdainfully of the "promiscuous multitude" which followed Old Hickory's leadership. He found Jacksonian monetary policies compounded of malice, misinformation and prejudice. It is indicative of the general tone of Ogg's volume that he ended his summation of the Jacksonian achievement with a condemnation of the spoils system, which, in his judgment "debauched the civil service and did the country lasting harm."³⁶

If Ogg accepted much of Turner's explanation of the origins of the Jacksonian movement while deploring much of the Jacksonian influence in American life, his more notable contemporary, Professor Edward Channing of Harvard University, rejected the fundamental premises of the Turner interpretation of Jacksonian Democracy. In the fifth volume of his massive History of the United States, published in 1926, Channing denied the importance of the frontier West in the Jacksonian political alliance. "Jackson," he wrote, "was really chosen to the presidency by the solid South, as was quite proper as he was a Southern man, a slave holder and a cotton grower." Differing with Turner in regarding the Southwest as an integral part of the "solid South" rather than of the frontier West, Channing interpreted the Jacksonian movement as an expression of the states rights conservatism of the southern plantation interests. Though the Southern planters had entered into a tenuous alliance with the emergent radicalism of Northern urban democracy, that alliance was thoroughly dominated by their conservative viewpoint. Jackson's political success in Channing's judgment, had

³⁶Ibid., p. 236.

been made possible only by their support. "However one manipulates the figures, it would seem that Jackson was raised to the presidency by the over-representation of the South. . . ." Though balking at nullification, "Jackson held to the full the Southern ideas" on the other essential issues of the period: states rights, the American System and the strict construction of the Constitution. Regarding Jackson as a "master politician who successfully harmonized Southern agricultural and Northern Democratic interests," he concluded that basically the Jacksonians were a conservative force in the nation's political life. As President, Jackson "used the powers of his office to restrain rather than execute." Only on the question of the "reconstruction of the public service" did Jackson's ideas conform to the demands of "the Northern radicalism."

Though Channing deprecated most of the more extreme Whig charges against Jacksonian rule, his account of the Jacksonian administration was rather unsympathetic. A profound admirer of John Quincy Adams and the political tradition he symbolized, Channing deplored the demagoguery of Jacksonian electioneering. In his narrative, the coming of Jackson represented the almost total eclipse of statesmanship. Though Channing, drawing on Fish's monograph, argued that most nineteenth century historians greatly exaggerated the scope of the Jacksonian removals, he followed nineteenth century historiography in labeling the inauguration of the spoils system "one of the greatest scandals in our history." Though he ridiculed the argument that Jackson's financial policies triggered the Panic of 1837, on the grounds that the distress was world wide and originated in the European money market, he found the Jacksonian crusade against the second Bank of the

United States grounded in ignorance and malice. He declared that the Bank struggle "was really part of the never ending struggle between localism and nationalism" which he conceived to be the grand theme of American history, and pronounced Old Hickory's followers proponents of the narrowest of localism. In Channing's pages, the Jacksonians appeared as a reactionary, not a progressive, force in the nation's political development. Few of Channing's contemporaries, however, accepted his rather unique interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. To most early twentieth century historians of the Jackson era, the Turner thesis offered the most satisfying explanation of the Jacksonians significance in American history.³⁷

Turner's analysis, however, was challenged by scholars who felt that his thesis underplayed the role of class struggle and class antagonism in the Jacksonian movement. Turning their attention to the labor movement of Jackson's day, these historians emphasized the importance of urban radicalism in shaping the Jacksonian appeal. Some, rejecting the Turner thesis as an over-simplification of the complex politics of the Jacksonian era, also argued for an interpretation of the period which would emphasize its essential pluralism.

Interestingly enough, the first historian to fully appreciate that pluralism was the socialist-publicist, Algie Simons, whose Marxist orientation led him to investigate the importance of the trade union movement during the Jacksonian years. Simons, who drew heavily on the information concerning the labor movement provided in McMaster's studies of the Jacksonian years, declared that labor movement "measured by the

³⁷ Edward Channing, *A History of the United States* (New York, 1926), V, 351, 352, 368, 375-395, 428, 432-447, 455.

impress it left . . . the most important event in American history." Simons found both class conscious proletarian elements and "the rising bourgeoisie" within the Jackson movement. Though he deemed the movement essentially bourgeois in its attitudes, he regarded the proletarian labor elements an important, historically significant minority within the Jacksonian ranks. Simons deprecated Turner's idealizing of the frontier democracy. "The 'frontier' which is spoken of as being ascendant under Jackson was distinctly individualistic and small capitalistic in its instincts, rather than proletarian." The true contribution to American history came not from the frontier, in his analysis, but from the cities, where the wageworkers "fired into brief activity" first came to possess "that sense of coming social power which alone gives the class consciousness necessary to effective opportunity." The Jacksonian movement as a whole, however, Simons found rather devoid of true socialist idealism. "It was neither frontier, nor wage working, nor even purely capitalist in its make-up. It can better be characterized as the "democracy of expectant capitalists. It borrowed something from the frontier. Its brutality, crudeness, coarseness, admiration for boorishness and ignorance, have been especially ascribed to the frontier, but they belong equally well to crude, competitive capitalism."³⁸

Though the immediate impact of Simon's essentially Marxist interpretation of the Jacksonian years was rather limited, the publication of several specialized studies gave impetus to his demands for a revision of Turner's conception of the origins of the Jacksonian movement. The history of the American labor movement, published by

³⁸Algie H. Simons, Social Forces in American History (New York, 1911), pp. 179-190, 209-210; Class Struggles in America (Chicago, 1906).

John R. Commons and associates in 1918, emphasized the importance of the urban workingmen's parties in sustaining the radical, anti-monopoly wing of the Jacksonian party. "During the entire trade union period," wrote Edward B. Middleman who authored that portion of the Commons study which dealt with the Jacksonian labor movement, "the workingmen, together with the master mechanics and small tradesmen who also felt the sting of corporations and banks, had agitated against these so-called monopolies. Both voted with the Democratic party which traditionally was an anti-monopoly party. The fight which Jackson had led on the United States Bank was the latest glorious example. The local democracy, however, was not always true to faith and very often was corrupt. It broke promises and some of its members accepted bribes and supported charters. It was here that the workingmen and small business men combined to run opposition candidates." The political activity of urban radical groups, not the influence of the frontier, in Middleman's analysis, sustained the anti-monopoly cause.³⁹

Columbia professor Dixon Ryan Fox, in his Decline of Aristocracy In the Politics of New York, published in 1919, found economic status, not geography, the factor which determined political affiliation in the Empire State during the Jacksonian years. Analyzing voting behavior in the larger cities of the state, Fox found "where the property per capita was relatively large, the ward was Whig . . . where mechanics made their home, Democratic candidates generally were certain of election." Henry H. Simms, a student of Fox at Columbia, found the same pattern in his analysis of Virginia politics during the Jacksonian

³⁹John R. Commons (ed.), The History of Labour in the United States (New York, 1918), pp. 458-459.

years. Simms concluded "the struggle between the Jackson and anti-Jackson forces was in large part a class struggle. Jackson unlike Jefferson was a social Democrat. . . . the principle opposition to Jackson in the state came from conservative classes, from men possessed of property in slaves and otherwise, who refused to accept either his brand of nationalism or his theory of democracy." To Simms, who found no evidence that Jacksonian political strength in Virginia was centered in the frontier areas, the essential theme of the Jacksonian period was "the struggle between the leveling tendencies of Jacksonian Democracy and conservative elements possessed of property." In the analysis offered by Fox and Simms, class cleavages in Jacksonian politics appeared far more clear cut than they had in the interpretation offered by the Marxist scholar, Algie B. Simons.⁴⁰

The studies of the Locofoco movement published by William Trimble, a graduate student in Turner's seminar, offered further grist for the revisionists' mill. Though Trimble adhered to the teachings of Turner in finding the "Democratic party of the time . . . essentially agrarian," he found the Locofoco movement an expression of the class antagonisms of urban and industrial America, and labeled the movement "in reality a nascent proletarian movement." He also found this fringe movement closer to Jeffersonian idealism and more genuinely egalitarian than the main body of the Democratic party. He further concluded that it was only when Locofoco precepts triumphed within the party during the Van Buren administration that "the Democratic Republican party . . .

⁴⁰Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York, 1919), pp. 422, 426, 429, 431, 436-438; Henry R. Simms, The Rise of the Whigs in Virginia, 1824-1840 (Richmond, 1929), pp. 36, 165-166.

began to become (at least in the North) the modern Democratic party." He suggested that "modern industrialism in the United States and the Democratic party developed contemporaneously." The burden of Trimble's study was that the urban radicalism of the Locofocos, not the egalitarianism of the frontier, sustained Democratic idealism during the Jacksonian years.⁴¹

Perhaps the most thorough critique of this new urban, class conflict interpretation of the Jacksonian movement published during the 1920's was offered by Arthur B. Darling. Darling's studies of the Jacksonian movement in Massachusetts offered no support to the labor thesis advanced by Commons, Fox, Simms and Trimble. Darling took Commons to task for misinterpreting the nature of the so-called "workingmen's movement" in Massachusetts. The Workingmen's party, he wrote, was "not representative of an urban and industrial proletariat in Massachusetts . . . the Workingmen's movement was preponderantly a rural and agrarian party, with an urban complement of carpenters, masons and ship caulkers, the mechanics of those days." He found the party claimed a higher percentage of the vote in the rural areas of the West than in urban Boston. As for the Democratic party itself, Darling argued that although it did command stronger support from the lower classes than from the propertied, it too was basically a rural party. "The largest group in the Democratic party was the small farming class

⁴¹William Trimble, "Diverging Tendencies in New York Democracy In the Period of the Locofocos," American Historical Review, XXIV (April, 1919), 396-421; "The Social Philosophy of the Locofoco Democracy," The American Journal of Sociology, XXVI (March, 1921), 705-715.

of the Western and Southern counties."⁴²

Darling's dissent notwithstanding, however, scholars of the 1920's came to pay increasing attention to the role played by urban laboring groups in the politics of the Jacksonian period. In 1922, Arthur L. Schlesinger, then professor of history at the University of Iowa, published an essay, "The Significance of Jacksonian Democracy," which placed equal emphasis on the "rise of a new society in the West" and on "the development of a dynamic labor movement in the East" in the shaping of the Jacksonian crusade. The labor movement, reflecting the increasing urban distress which followed in the wake of industrialism, in Schlesinger's analysis, provided the winning ingredient in the Jacksonian political coalition. "Indeed, [Jackson] could not have been elected president if the votes of the laboring men of the Northeast had not been added to those of his followers in the Southeast and West. Jackson capitalized this support when he waged battle against the great financial monopoly, the United States Bank, and gave express recognition to its demands when he established the ten hour work day in the federal shipyards in 1836."⁴³

The new emphasis on urban labor and on class cleavages as dynamic factors in the Jacksonian movement was echoed in numerous monographic studies. L. Malcolm Carroll's Origins of the Whig Party, published in 1925, found the Whig party the vehicle of the propertied

⁴²Arthur B. Darling, "Jacksonian Democracy in Massachusetts, 1821-1848," American Historical Review, XIX, 271-287; "The Workingman's Party in Massachusetts, 1833-1834," Ibid., XXIX (October, 1923), 81-86.

⁴³Arthur L. Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History (New York, 1922), pp. 201-218.

classes instinctively hostile to the aspirations of the rising labor movement. Henry R. Dueller's study of The Whig Party in Pennsylvania, published three years earlier, found the Whig party in that state solidly supported by the prosperous. "The conclusion is almost inevitable," he wrote, "that although the Whigs did not include all the people of wealth in the state, yet the vast majority of those possessing vested interests felt that the Whig party offered them more protection than did the opposition party." Reginald McGrane, in his study of The Panic of 1837, followed Trimble in perceiving in the Loco-foco movement the expression of the "conflict between capital and labor." Nathan Fine, a socialist scholar, declared in his Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, "the awakening of labor was part of the new Jacksonian democracy. The men of toil wanted their place in the sun. Once organized, the workmen's parties filled their platforms with all their social and economic grievances."⁴⁴

Among those to perceive the Jacksonian movement as essentially a struggle of economic classes was Charles A. Beard. Beard, for some time critical of the Turner thesis because of what he regarded as its over-emphasis of sectional and geographic factors and its neglect of class antagonisms, labeled the Jacksonian movement "the left wing" of Jeffersonian republicanism. "Jacksonian Democracy," he wrote, was "a triumphant farmer labor party."⁴⁵

⁴⁴E. Malcolm Carroll, Origins of the Whig Party (Durham, 1925), pp. 170-227; Henry R. Dueller, The Whig Party in Pennsylvania (New York, 1922), pp. 243-245; Reginald McGrane, The Panic of 1837 (Chicago, 1924), p. 149; Nathan Fine, Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States (New York, 1928), p. 12.

⁴⁵Charles A. Beard, "The Frontier in American History," The New Republic, XXV (February, 1921), 349-350; Charles A. Beard and Mary Beard, The Rise of American Civilization (New York, 1927), I, 557.

Even so, Beard accepted much of Turner's analysis of the role of sectionalism in the Jacksonian movement. In his analysis, the Jacksonians added to the old alliance of Western farmers and Southern agrarians the laboring classes of the large cities who were just beginning to feel the pressure of incipient industrialism. These classes, according to Beard, had a common interest in opposition to the neo-Hamiltonian policies espoused by Clay and Adams and symbolized by their support of Nicholas Biddle's Second Bank of the United States. "Jackson, in waging war on the Bank," Beard wrote in 1928, "made himself the open champion of the humbler members of society, the farmers, mechanics and laborers against the rich and the powerful." Supporting the interests of "the rich and the powerful . . . the financial and industrial interests of New England and the Middle states" were the National Republican and the Whig parties. Whig espousal of Jeffersonian and Democratic principles, in Beard's judgment, was sheer cant: "There was no doubt about the measures which the Whig leaders supported in their hearts. In their program, the Federalist creed was repeated in full, or rather, it might be more correct to say, continued unbroken." Beard, like the partisans of Jackson, found Whiggery to be but disguised Federalism, no less hostile to the best interests of the majority than its precursor.⁴⁶

Interestingly enough, Beard ignored Jacksonian hard money advocacy and deemed the movement primarily inflationist. The Jacksonians, in his analysis, represented the economic interests of the debtor classes. "Republican philosophers on the left," Beard wrote, "while bitterly

⁴⁶Charles A. Beard, The Economic Basis of Politics and Related Writings (New York, 1957), pp. 184-193.

opposing the United States Bank favored a more generous issue of notes by state banks, on the theory that they could pay their debts easier and sell their produce at higher prices if a great deal of money was afloat. . . . In their paper money practices, the Jacksonian Democrats went beyond the Constitution back to the time of Shay's rebellion." Beard, pioneer student of the role played by economic interests in the formation of the Constitution, apparently endeavored to project the economic cleavages he perceived in the period of the Confederation into the age of Jackson.⁴⁷

A more sophisticated analysis of the Jacksonian movement was provided by the great scholar of American literature, Vernon Louis Parrington. Parrington, a former populist, was closer to Turner's agrarian idealism than Beard. However, he shared Beard's conviction that class antagonisms lay at the root of the Jacksonian movement. Jackson's "motley following of Western agrarians and Eastern proletarians," Parrington declared, had perceived that:

The waters of prosperity . . . had been trickling somewhat too scantily to them from the great reservoirs where they were impounded; and as they saw the wealth pouring into private ponds through governmental pipe lines, a natural human envy took possession of them. In theory, the pipe lines belonged to them, and the impounded waters were to be used for common irrigation; but in practice the mains seemed to conduct only to Lowell industrialists and Philadelphia and New York capitalists, and the waters turned out to be privately owned. As the recognition of this fact came home to the producing mass it provided a rallying point for the anti-monopolist movement and determined the great objective of the Jacksonian attack, the assault on the Bank.

Parrington, like Beard, accepted the Jacksonian definition of the party battles of the era: "The driving force of the new Democracy was the

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 188.

same class feeling that had done service a generation before . . . the will to destroy the aristocratic principle in government." Parrington's emotional sympathies were most decidedly on the side of Jackson and his followers. Old Hickory, he declared with feeling, "was one of the few Presidents whose heart and sympathy were with the plain people, and who clung to the simple faith that government must deal as justly with the poor as with the rich."⁴⁸

However, Parrington found Jacksonian Democracy permeated with anachronisms. In his judgment the movement possessed no political philosophy adequate to cope with the changing circumstances of the new era. "As Jackson's policy unfolded it became clear that Jackson had not changed with changing times. He remained to the last the product of an earlier domestic economy, with an old-fashioned horror of debt . . . in his attitude toward the Bank, as in his attitude toward internal improvements, Jackson returned to the agrarian position of Jefferson and John Taylor, nullifying for a time the victories gained by the middle class during the boom period of nationalism. The more he learned about the methods of capitalistic finance, the more he distrusted it." Parrington, unlike Beard, regarded Jackson as a hard money advocate--as, in fact, he was--and he regarded the hard money panacea woefully inadequate. Under the Jacksonian aegis, in Parrington's judgment, "the American people were wanting in an adequate democratic program suited to the changing times."⁴⁹

⁴⁸Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1954), II, 138-144.

⁴⁹Ibid., II, 142-143.

Parrington regretted the passing of the agrarian egalitarianism exemplified by Jefferson and Jackson. In writing of the triumph of middle class individualism which followed the failure of Jackson's crusade to preserve the simple virtues of the Old America, Parrington declared rather bitterly: "Perhaps the rarest bit of irony in American history is the later custodianship of democracy by the middle class, who, while perfecting their tariffs and subsidies, legislating from the bench, exploiting the state and outlawing all political theories but their own, denounce all class consciousness as unpatriotic and all agrarian programs as undemocratic. But it was no fault of Andrew Jackson if the final outcome of the great movement of Jacksonian democracy was so untoward; it was rather the fault of the times that they were not ripe for democracy." In Parrington's work, as in Turner's to whom he was intellectually greatly indebted, there may be perceived strong undercurrents of nostalgia for the Jeffersonian past, for the earlier purity and simplicity of the Old Republic. Parrington was an astute Jacksonian. His work lamented the betrayal of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian ideal by those politicians who "used the movement for narrow partisan ends." In its eagerness to build a capitalist paradise, Jacksonian America destroyed the idealism of the Jeffersonian heritage.⁵⁰

If Beard and Parrington retained much of the Turner conception of Jacksonian Democracy in their work, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whose Pulitzer prize winning Age of Jackson appeared in 1945, rejected most of Turner's theorizings. Taking issue with Turner's explanation of Jacksonian Democracy as the product of the Western frontier and of

⁵⁰Ibid., II, 45, 214-229.

sectional antagonisms, Schlesinger declared the cities of the East rather than the pioneer settlements of the West the true birthplace of the most creative and radical Jacksonian conceptions and argued that "more can be understood about Jacksonian Democracy if it is regarded as a problem not of sections but of classes." Basically, Schlesinger's disagreement with the earlier Democratic historians of Jackson centered about their conception of the Jacksonian mission. While the followers of Turner had conceived of the Jacksonian uprising as a crusade for political democracy, with undertones of sectional economic antagonisms, Schlesinger regarded the movement as the quest of submerged classes determined to use their political power to assure their freedom from economic exploitation in a society increasingly dominated by the business interests. It was the determination of the Jacksonians, in Schlesinger's interpretation, "to control the power of the capitalist groups, mainly Eastern, for the benefit of non-capitalist groups, farmers and laboring men, West and South." Jacksonian Democracy was but another episode in that historical struggle "on the part of the other sections of society to restrain the business community" which, for Schlesinger, constituted the main theme of the American past.⁵¹

In that struggle, Schlesinger found the emergent labor groups of the Eastern cities the most determined in their efforts to attain social justice. The Western frontiersmen whom Turner had celebrated for their hardy devotion to democracy, Schlesinger found rather indifferent to the essential matters of economic reform, which, in his analysis, constituted the core of the Jacksonian mission. In a

⁵¹Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, 1945), pp. 189, 205-209, 257n, 301, 505, 514.

provocative reversal of Turner's praise of the classless society of the West as the birthplace of democratic idealism, Schlesinger argued that the very lack of hard and fast class distinctions rendered the Western Jacksonians indifferent to the real need for economic reforms. "The new quest for economic democracy meant little to men of the West, however deeply they cared for political and civil freedoms . . . living a life of substantial equality with limitless vistas of economic opportunity before them, they aimed more at establishing local self-government and majority rule than in safeguarding the material foundations of political democracy." The Eastern labor interests, on the other hand, threatened with the destruction of their status and plagued by nagging insecurity, were of necessity more "sensitive to economic issues." Out of their sensitivity to the need for reform, in Schlesinger's judgment, came the truly creative contribution of the Jacksonian movement.⁵²

That contribution to Schlesinger was the realization that the non-capitalist groups in society must unite, not to destroy capitalism, but "to keep the capitalists from destroying it." Though Schlesinger recognized that the Jacksonians came to this realization slowly and never really formulated a philosophical justification of their course, he believed that the struggle against the Bank of the United States and the American System as well as the Jacksonian demands for the state control and regulation of banking and business represented a pragmatic acceptance of the necessity to restrain the selfish proclivities of the business class in the interest of the public welfare. Schlesinger argued that the Jacksonians, though believing in the Jeffersonian creed

⁵²Ibid., pp. 57-59, 142, 262-263.

of limited government, were driven by the necessity of events to espouse, in increasing measure, the adoption of Hamiltonian means to attain Jeffersonian ends. Though they never fully appreciated the implications of this development, the Jacksonians "under the banner of anti-statism . . . carried on a vigorous program of government intervention" designed to check the growing power of the business community. It was therefore no accident that "Jackson, ruling in the name of weak government, ended up by leaving the presidency stronger than it had ever been before." In Schlesinger's analysis, this development was inevitable, for the Jacksonians were caught up in the "irrepressible conflict of capitalism: the struggle on the part of the business community to dominate the state, and on the part of the rest of society, under the leadership of the liberals, to check the political ambitions of business." Despite their bondage to the "anti-statist" assumptions of Jeffersonianism, the Jacksonians, by throwing the weight of the federal government into the balance to check the power of corporate wealth, as symbolized by Nicholas Biddle's Bank and as served by Henry Clay's American System, in effect began the "redirection" of American liberalism. With the coming of Jackson, American liberals came to accept concepts of positive government in practice if not in profession. In that sense, Schlesinger deemed the Jacksonians the precursors of the New Deal.⁵³

In interpreting Jacksonian Democracy as an essentially "anti-capitalist" movement grounded in class antagonisms and directed to the restraint, though not the destruction, of the capitalist classes,

⁵³Ibid., pp. 509-523.

Schlesinger by no means ignored the fact that there were many within the Jacksonian fold who accepted no such program. Indeed, perhaps no historian has been more aware than Schlesinger of the essential pluralism and diversity of the party of Jackson and Van Buren. But in his judgment the state banking interests who opposed the hard money policy, the Western Jacksonians who supported the American System and the Southern planters who harbored hostility to egalitarian democracy, though numerous, were by no means in the main stream of the Jacksonian movement. The true spokesmen of the Jacksonian faith, to Schlesinger, were not the Nathan P. Tallmadges and the David Henshaws, devoted to personal profit and motivated by sheer opportunism, nor the Calhouns pledged to the defense of slavery. They were rather the Van Burens, the Wrights and the Bancrofts dedicated to the true interests of the common people of the land. Schlesinger found Jacksonian idealism dominant, Jacksonian conservatism and opportunism secondary.⁵⁴

In his treatment of the Whig opposition, Schlesinger drew heavily and rather uncritically on Jacksonian judgments. The opposition to the Jacksonian movement he portrayed as the heirs of Federalist belief in the rule of privilege and vested interest, flying the false colors of democratic faith. Though aware of the existence within the Whig party of liberal reformers and humanitarians, Schlesinger regarded them as a small minority hopelessly out of place in a party of reaction and carefully recorded their individual defections from Whiggery and their disenchantment with the party's leadership. One rather hostile reviewer of the Age of Jackson remarked, with some malice and exaggeration but not without some justification that Schlesinger's

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 43, 59, 115, 119, 122, 125, 169, 239.

account was marred by a "Manichean naivete with respect to the nobility of all things Jacksonian and the sordidness of all things opposed."

Mr. Schlesinger's vocabulary purrs over his friends. The landscapes at the Hermitage and Kinderhook smile in a fashion not noticeable where Whigs and Federalists live. The Jacksonian leaders have a pervading insight, their wrath is "magnificent," one or another of them is "handsome," "grave," "masterly," "erudite," "thoughtful," "quiet," "intelligent," "brilliant," etc. etc., and the old hero himself is thoroughly fond of children. The opposition is a sorry outfit. They are Bank "lackeys," they "roar," and "snarl," they deal in "hullabaloo," they are "phony," they are "fantasies," they work "backstairs," their best minds are "opaque" and one gets the impression that Mr. Schlesinger never thinks of them as loving little children at all.

The reviewer continued to point out that Schlesinger, in the style of a Jackson polemist, made "the Bank a dim sort of monied monstrosity and Biddle a vague, sinister figure, "drunk with power," whose career is a darkened background for Jackson's gleaming achievements." Yet it must be noted in Schlesinger's defense that this treatment was but a reflection of his belief in the existence of a deep-seated conflict of interest between the political aspirations of the business classes, determined to use their power to aggrandise their wealth, and the spokesmen for the masses of society, no less determined to protect the common man from economic exploitation. Schlesinger thus accepted the radical Jacksonian argument that a conflict of interest between the capitalist class and the producing members of society constituted the essential basis of the party divisions of the Jackson era. Had he accepted the Whig belief in the unity of class interests and joined with Whig spokesmen in rejecting the Jacksonian appeal as sheer demagoguery, he no doubt would have been compelled to employ rather colorful adjectives to describe the wickedness of the Jacksonian demagogues. His reviewer, as we shall see, was hardly generous in his characterization

of the Jacksonian partisans in his own studies of the Jackson era.⁵⁵

Though Schlesinger's interpretation of the party battles of the Jackson era made use of an economic theory of politics, his total analysis was by no means grounded in a narrow economic determinism. A pragmatist and a pluralist in his approach to history, Schlesinger dismissed the notion that historical causation can be explained solely in terms of class antagonism. He placed much emphasis on intellectual and moral considerations as causative factors in history and rather firmly rejected the Marxist and Beardian interpretations of the causes of the Civil War. Though stressing the presence of deep class consciousness in the Jackson era, he refused to allow this concern with the class struggle to harden into a narrowly monistic interpretation of history.⁵⁶

Jacksonian historiography during the first four decades of the twentieth century was largely dominated by historians sympathetic to the Jacksonian movement. Though they differed as to the nature and origins of Jacksonian democracy, some regarding the movement as the product of agrarian egalitarianism, others as the outgrowth of urban radicalism, and class antagonisms, their works, though seldom blatantly partisan, were nonetheless most friendly to the Jacksonian cause. Although, as Frank Freidel has pointed out, textbook writers in the twenties and thirties, frequently echoed the earlier pro-Whig interpretations of the Gilded Age, the majority of scholars working in the Jackson era found Old Hickory the guardian of the democratic faith.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 279, 296; Bray Hammond, "Public Policy and National Banks," Journal of Economic History, VII (May, 1946), 79-84.

⁵⁶Schlesinger, pp. 2, 432.

This spirit of Jacksonian partisanship was most pronounced in two best-selling popular surveys of the Jackson years, Claude Bowers' Party Battles of the Jackson Period, published in 1922 and Marquis James' Andrew Jackson, Portrait of a President, which appeared in 1937. These vivid accounts brought the revisionist, pro-Jacksonian interpretations of Old Hickory and his movement to millions of readers.⁵⁷

The Democratic interpretation of Jacksonian Democracy, however, never enjoyed that virtually unchallenged ascendancy which had been granted to the earlier, conservative version of the Jacksonian era which had dominated the Gilded Age. Several notable scholars strongly dissented from the new revisionism. We have already noted Channing's interpretation of the Jackson movement as a reactionary force in American politics. The study of The Second Bank of the United States, published in 1903 by Ralph C. H. Catterall of the University of Chicago, found the Jacksonians responsible for most of the financial chaos which characterized American banking in the nineteenth century. Accepting the Whig argument that the Bank was essential to the stabilization of the currency, Catterall argued that it was "obvious that Jackson and his supporters committed an offense against the nation when they destroyed the bank. The magnitude and enormity of that offense can only be faintly realized, but one is certainly justified in saying that few greater enormities are chargeable to politicians than the destruction of the Bank of the United States." Catterall, one of the few scholars to study the Bank's economic function, concluded that

⁵⁷Frank Freidel, "Jackson's Political Removals as seen by Historians," The Historian, II (Winter, 1939), 41-52; Claude Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period (New York, 1922); Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, Portrait of a President (New York, 1937).

"the old bank, in its services to the government, was far superior to any other banking system known in this country." Catterall deplored the destruction of a great financial institution by misinformed politicians who, though sincere in their beliefs, lacked true understanding of financial matters. He expressed his regret that the political influence of "enlightened businessmen" in politics "has always been inconsiderable, partly because they are not interested in politics, partly because they are themselves objects of suspicion to the democratic masses." Catterall's distaste for the Jacksonian movement was fully shared by his eminent Russian contemporary, Moisie Ostrogorski, whose massive two volume Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, published in 1902, echoed the Whig denunciations of Jacksonian despotism and executive usurpation.⁵⁸

Whig invective also received the approbation of Doctor Charles D. Wiltse, a career civil servant, whose three volume biography of John C. Calhoun, published in the late forties and early fifties, provided perhaps the ablest twentieth century restatement of the Whig interpretation of the Jackson era. Wiltse saw Jacksonian politics as essentially a vulgar, unprincipled scramble for the public trough. He deplored the vulgarizing influence of the spoils system, dismissed Jacksonian professions of democratic idealism as sheer demagoguery, and labeled Old Hickory himself a "frontier bully."⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ralph C. H. Catterall, The Second Bank of the United States (Chicago, 1903), pp. 168-224, 476-477; Moisie Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties (New York, 1902), pp. 46-54, 65-68.

⁵⁹Charles D. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun (Indianapolis, 1944-1951), I, 155-163; II, 354ff.

Perhaps the most provocative interpretation of the Jacksonian movement advanced by the critics of the revisionists was provided by Professor Thomas P. Abernethy of the University of Virginia. Abernethy, in studying Andrew Jackson's role in Tennessee politics prior to his elevation to the presidency, found Old Hickory hostile to the rising democratic reform movement in his home state. The conversion of Old Hickory and his immediate followers to the Democratic cause, he argued, was sheer opportunism; basically, Jackson was a frontier aristocrat quite opposed to economic reform movements which might imperil the rights of landed property and totally devoid of any real democratic idealism. Of Jackson he concluded: "he always believed in making the public serve the ends of the politician. Democracy was good talk with which to win the favor of the people and thereby accomplish ulterior objectives. Jackson never really championed the cause of the people; he only invited them to champion his." Abernethy added, however, that Jackson "was not consciously hypocritical in this. It was merely the usual way of doing business in those primitive and ingenious times."⁶⁰

Abernethy's skepticism of Old Hickory's democratic idealism was fully shared by Richard R. Stenberg, a Texan who was disposed to grant less charity in his analysis of Jackson's motives. Stenberg, in a series of articles published in the 1920's, drew a harsh portrait of Jackson as a treacherous, hypocritical self-seeking politician narrow and vindictive in his personal relationships. His animosity toward Old Hickory rivaled the most inveterate Whig pamphleteers. His interpretation, however, was accepted by few contemporary historians. A

⁶⁰Thomas P. Abernethy, From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy (Chapel Hill, 1932), pp. 238-249.

pronounced sympathy for the Jacksonian movement and its leader characterized most of the historical literature of the first half of the century.⁶¹

Although historians of the early twentieth century were generally agreed in regarding the Jacksonian movement as a creative, positive force in the nation's political life, there was much less consensus as to the exact nature of the Jacksonian mission. In the early decades of the century, primary emphasis was placed upon Jacksonian democracy as an expression of the egalitarian idealism of the agrarian frontier. In this view, the Jacksonian crusade was a struggle to realize and to sustain the ideals of the Old Republic--agrarian simplicity, political democracy, and economic opportunity. These scholars took quite literally the Jacksonian portrayal of themselves as the guardians of the Jeffersonian heritage.

To historians writing in the decade of the Progressive movement, the by-gone simplicity of the Jeffersonian ideal was an object of profound nostalgia. Influenced by Progressivism, they shared the Progressive's fears of both monopoly capitalism and of the potential threat of the class conscious radicalism of a growing industrial proletariat. Torn between recognition of the need to cope with the changing circumstances of a complex industrial society and a longing for the America of

⁶¹Richard R. Stenberg, "Jackson, Anthony Butler and Texas," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, XIII (December, 1932), 264-286; "The Texas Schemes of Jackson and Houston, 1829-1836," Ibid., XV (December, 1934), 229-250; "Jackson, Buchanan and the Corrupt Bargain Calumny," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LVIII (January, 1934), 61-85; "Jackson's Neches Claims, 1829-1836," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXXIV (April, 1936), 255-274; "Andrew Jackson and the Irving Affidavit," Ibid., XLI (October, 1937), 142-153; "Jackson's Rhea Letter Hoax," Journal of Southern History, II (November, 1936), 430-496; "A Note on the Jackson-Calhoun Breach of 1830-1831," Tyler's Historical and Genealogical Magazine, XXI (October, 1939), 65-69.

the past, these scholars were most attracted to the Jacksonian struggle against the growing power of the Bank and to the Jacksonian belief in the rule of the whole people. Political democracy, the great Progressive panacea, was traced to the Jacksonian years. Jackson symbolized the virtues of an earlier America, where, it was believed, economic opportunity rendered class antagonisms unnecessary and a vigilant Democracy made impossible the triumph of corporate power. The Jacksonian concept of a strong President as the watch-dog of popular rights, discredited by the patrician scholars of the Gilded Age, received new credence from that scholarly generation whose heroes were Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. The political process itself, including the vulgar turbulence of spoils system politics, ceased to be an object of fastidious aversion. To those who believed profoundly in political action as the safeguard of freedom, the Jacksonian political innovations took on a new meaning. The Jacksonian argument that the spoils system was but a means of rendering government responsive to the will of the governed seemed most credible.

As the twentieth century progressed, however, the explanation of Jacksonian Democracy advanced by the agrarian democratic school appeared increasingly inadequate. Turner and his followers had placed little emphasis on either the role of urban labor in the Jackson movement or the importance of class cleavages and class antagonisms in American politics. To scholars writing in the milieu of an urban, industrial America both seemed increasingly important. Moreover, in the midst of an economy characterized by boom and bust, affluence and deep poverty, social reform commanded increasing attention as a theme of American history. Accordingly, historians came to emphasize the

importance of the Jacksonian labor movement and of those urban Jacksonian spokesmen who had denounced corporate monopoly, and demanded economic justice. To scholars who grew up in the depression decade of the thirties, an economic interpretation of the Jacksonian movement was most compelling. In Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s Age of Jackson, which found in the Jacksonian years the rudimentary origins of the New Deal philosophy of positive governmental action to curb the excesses of the business community and assure economic and social justice, this interpretation received its fullest expression.

Though the political and intellectual trends of the twentieth century clearly helped shape Jacksonian historiography, historians nonetheless attained a higher degree of objectivity and sophistication than had characterized their counterparts of the Gilded Age. A more judicious, balanced tone came to replace the blatant polemics of a von Holst or a Schouler. Scholars evidenced an increasing concern with the problem of historical causation, and devoted more of their efforts to determining the origins of the Jacksonian movement than to praise or condemnation. Analysis replaced polemic. To explain rather than to judge came to be the professed goal of the writers of history. Though it would be impossible to characterize the Jacksonian historiography of the first half of the twentieth century as purely "objective" its achievements are nonetheless impressive.

CHAPTER V

RECENT TRENDS IN JACKSONIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Few aspects of the American past have provoked as much controversy or been subject to as much reappraisal in the past decade and a half as the Jacksonian era. Revisionist scholars have challenged the validity of both the urban labor and agrarian interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy. They have placed increasing emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurial elements within the Jacksonian coalition and have argued that the movement was essentially middle class in its program and aspiration. The application of modern banking theory to the study of Jackson's crusade against the Bank of the United States has led also to increased criticism of the wisdom of Jacksonian monetary policies. Recent scholarly studies of the Jacksonian Democracy in several individual states and of the nature of the Jacksonian labor movement have led to heated debate on the nature of the Jacksonian electorate. In recent years, there has been little consensus among historians on the origins and nature of the Jacksonian movement or on its influence in the main stream of American political life. There has, however, been an increased tendency to grant sympathy to the Whig position and credence to certain of their partisan arguments.

During the past decade, many historians have come to question the validity of class conflict as an explanation of American political history. Increasingly, it has been argued that consensus on basic

liberal, middle class values has characterized our past. The absence of rigid class barriers, of a stratified aristocracy, proletariat or peasantry, has been advanced as a basic explanation of the development of American institutions. Scholars, often drawing heavily on de Tocqueville, have contended that Americans have never been divided on essential ideological issues. They have found American political parties essentially alike in their fundamental philosophies, perceiving in the political struggles of the past little expression of basic social animosities.

Recent Jacksonian historiography has reflected this trend. Louis Hartz of Harvard University, whose study of the Liberal Tradition in America represents perhaps the most brilliant application of this thesis to the sweep of American history, declared of the Jacksonian era, "virtually everyone, including the nascent industrial worker [had] the mentality of an independent entrepreneur." Hartz found that the Age of Jackson was characterized by almost unanimous acceptance of both democracy and capitalism. It was his conclusion that the partisan bombast of the period concealed a fundamental unanimity on values and an almost total sterility of political thought.¹

Richard Hofstadter of Columbia University, though finding some evidence of class cleavage in the politics of twentieth century America, emphasized the essentially capitalistic, middle class orientation of both parties of Jackson's era. In his highly popular study of the American Political Tradition Hofstadter wrote:

¹Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York, 1955), pp. 39-142.

The Jacksonian movement grew out of expanding opportunities and a common desire to enlarge these opportunities still further by removing restrictions and privileges that had their origin in acts of government; thus, with some qualifications it was essentially a movement of laissez faire, an attempt to divorce government and business. It is commonly recognized in American historical folklore that the Jackson movement was a phase in the expansion of democracy, but it is too little appreciated that it was also a phase in the expansion of liberated capitalism. While in the New Deal the democratic reformers were driven to challenge many of the assumptions of traditional American capitalism, in the Jacksonian period the democratic upsurge was closely linked to the ambitions of the small capitalist.²

Glyndon Van Deusen of the University of Rochester concurred with Hofstadter to the extent that "the political conflicts of the Jackson period were fought more often with a view to gaining control of the government than out of devotion to diametrically opposed political and social ideals." Van Deusen, however, agreed with Webster in finding the Jacksonian program hopelessly inadequate to meet the needs of an expanding capitalist society. He declared the Jacksonian movement "so heavily imbued with archaic notions about corporations, currency, banking and do-nothing government, that it would sooner or later have gone down to defeat, even without the aid of the great depression of 1837 it helped to bring on." Rejecting the Schlesinger interpretation of the Jacksonian movement as the precursor of the New Deal, Van Deusen found the Jacksonians less progressive than their political opponents. "The Whig attitude toward the role of government, on the national level, bears a closer resemblance to that of the New Deal than did the attitude toward government of Jackson and Van Buren."³

²Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition (New York, 1955), p. 56.

³Glyndon Van Deusen, "Some Aspects of Whig Thought and Theory in the Jacksonian Period," American Historical Review, LX (January,

Another scholar to argue that Jacksonian Democracy represented a reactionary, not a progressive force, in the nation's political life was Marvin Meyers of the University of Chicago whose highly provocative Jacksonian Persuasion appeared in 1957. Meyers, who endeavored to gain an insight into the "fears and hopes, the passions and beliefs that underlay . . . party loyalty" during the Jacksonian years through an analysis of Jacksonian rhetoric combined with a careful reading of de Tocqueville, concluded that the followers of Old Hickory played "upon the diffuse fears and resentments" of Americans living in an age of bewildering economic and social change. The Whigs, on the other hand, "spoke to their explicit hopes." The Jacksonians, in his analysis, looked to the past, the Whigs to the future.⁴

Jacksonian Democracy, in Meyers' interpretation, gave expression to the guilt and anxieties of men who, though pursuing the capitalist dream of wealth, longed for the simple, virtuous agrarian society of the past. The movement was grounded in deep fear of change and in bucolic nostalgia for the virtues of the Old Republic of Jefferson. Restoration of the Old Republic, not the creation of a new democratic society, was the touch-stone of the Jacksonian conception. "Jacksonian Democracy," Meyers wrote, "sought to recall agrarian republican innocence to a society drawn fatally to the main chance and the long chance,

1958), 305-322. See also The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848 (New York, 1959); Thurlow Weed, Wizard of the Lobby (Boston, 1947); Henry Clay (Boston, 1937).

⁴Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (New York, 1960), pp. v-ix, 3-11. Meyers' work first appeared in 1957. The citations here are from the Vintage paperback edition of three years later.

to revolutionizing ways of acquisition, emulative consumption, promotion and speculation." Theirs was a "struggle to reconcile again the simple yeoman values with the free pursuit of economic interest, just as the two were splitting hopelessly apart." It was a struggle foredoomed to failure, for "the generation that voted for Jackson and the restoration of old republican virtue was as acquisitive and speculative as any in American history." Pointing to the involvement of many Jacksonians in the very type of speculative ventures their rhetoric denounced, Meyers declared the followers of Jackson "both the judges and the judged." In his interpretation, the Jacksonian movement afforded little but verbal propitiation for a deep, uneasy sense of guilt.⁵

In most respects, Meyers' judgment of the Jacksonians was a harsh one. Their intellectual appeal he found superficial and limited. Jackson's messages he labeled "ragged political philosophy, tendentious accounting, crude policy." He found the anxieties expressed by the Jacksonians quite absurd. Writing of the Bank War, Meyers declared: "Broad popular hatred and fear of the Second Bank, invoked by the Jacksonian appeals, cannot be understood simply as a matter of fact

⁵Ibid., pp. 10-15, 21-24, 31-52, 74-77, 191-192, 212-222. Meyers did not regard the Jacksonians as conscious advocates of liberal capitalism. Though the Jacksonians invoked laissez faire and sought to unfetter enterprise, they were, in his judgment, without a vision of the future. He found that the Jacksonian program, viewed from the perspective of the present, "ought to appeal to the interests of one particular group, ambitious new business enterprisers," in actual fact the Jacksonian message, as Meyers read it, "barely acknowledged its logical beneficiaries, often abuses their traits and ways, and unmistakably favored other social types whose economic interests could be promoted only negatively and indirectly by such messages." Guilt, not confidence in the new economic order, he found at the root of Jacksonian rhetoric.

reaction to material injuries. The economic operations of the institution conferred some manifest general benefits, directly crossed the interests of only a limited number; its hand was not upon men's threats or in their pockets." He joined Van Deusen in regarding the Jacksonian aversion to speculation as short-sighted. Though granting that many of the speculative ventures of Jackson's day proved disastrous to the economy in the short run, Meyers argued that the "basic sense of direction" of the speculator provided the "key to . . . creative economic development." The Whigs in appealing to the great optimism of Americans in the Age of Jackson, Meyers contended, spoke from a justifiable confidence in the nation's future, while the Jacksonians were imprisoned by their fears and looked only to the past. "The liberalism of Jackson's message did not communicate a liberating purpose; there was no vision of a fresh civilization at the Western edge of civilization, certainly no dream of enterprise unbounded."⁶

Meyers' efforts to delve into the psychological meaning of Jacksonian rhetoric in many ways were reminiscent of a more limited study published in 1955 by John Ward of Princeton University, who shared many of Meyers' conclusions. In his Andrew Jackson: Symbol For an Age, Ward sought to explain Old Hickory's phenomenal personal

⁶Ibid., pp. 17, 31, 101-141. In his interpretation of the speculative mania of the Jackson era, Meyers drew heavily on Joseph A. Schumpeter, Business Cycles (New York, 1929), I, 294-296, as well as on the students of banking cited later in this chapter. Meyers' generalizations concerning "Whig optimism" were not supported by extensive evidence from the Whig rhetoric of the day and apparently were drawn from the Northern liberal wing of the party, not the Southern adherents of Whiggery, nor from the neo-Federalists within the ranks. Meyers' account was based largely on Jacksonian sources; The Jacksonian Persuasion contains few citations from Whig writings. An extensive case for the progressive nature of the Whig program was, however, offered by Glyndon Van Deusen.

popularity by analyzing the meaning of the Jackson image to Jackson's generation. He concluded that Jackson personified belief in the agrarian ideal, rejection of the influence of Europe, distrust of the intellectual, faith in the untutored, intuitive mind, fervent confidence in divine sanction for the American mission, as well as "the ideal of self-sufficient individualism which was the inevitable rationalization of America's disorganized development." To Ward, Jacksonian Democracy was the product of a generation which feared social change and held the good society possible only in an agrarian, frontier civilization:

. . . the image of Jackson [he wrote] apparently accepted by a majority of the people . . . rejected a complete acceptance of the advanced stages of civilization. This attitude was possible as long as the United States fronted free land so that its progress in civilization was constantly regenerated by contact with nature. The solution of a periodic return to nature was an uneasy one, however, since it had an obvious temporal limit. What was more important, the ideal of the admixture of nature and civilization was a static one. It could be achieved only in the pioneer stage when the wildness of nature had been subdued but the enervating influence of civilization had not yet been felt. As America moved toward a denser civilization, the conflict in logic implicit in the two ideas made ideological adjustment to a new social stage difficult. Jacksonian democratic thought, built upon a philosophy of nature in the concrete, was oriented to a period in American social development that was slipping away at the very moment of its formulation.

The interpretation of the Jacksonian movement offered by Van Deusen, Meyers and Ward were most reminiscent of those spokesmen of Whiggery, such as Calvin Colton, who argued that the Whig party was the party of economic progress and belief in the future, just as the Jacksonians stood for economic stagnation and financial anarchy. Indeed, in Van Deusen's charge that the Jacksonians were responsible for the depression of 1837, this acceptance of this Whig interpretation was given a most

⁷John Ward, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (New York, 1955), p. 45.

overt expression. In the writings of Meyers, and more particularly of Ward, the conception of the Jacksonians as reactionaries bound to the past, without faith in the future, was expressed in a vocabulary rather unlike the language of Whig polemicists, though the similarity of their conceptions is most pronounced.

If the broad interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy advanced by Hartz, Hofstadter, Van Deusen, Meyers and Ward challenged many of the assumptions of earlier twentieth century historians of the Jackson era, numerous specialized studies supported their demands for a reinterpretation of Jacksonian Democracy. The studies of the Jackson labor movement published by Joseph Dorfman of Columbia University, eminent authority on the history of American economic thought, were most critical of the Schlesinger "urban labor" thesis. Dorfman argued that the so-called "labor" spokesmen of the Jackson era were in reality nascent entrepreneurs who enunciated, not the demands of a submerged proletariat, but the program of the businessman-on-the-make. Pointing to their advocacy of strict laissez faire and limited government, he argued that these so-called "radicals" offered little to the "permanent wage earning class" but rather served the cause of those business groups who desired freedom from mercantilistic restrictions and special privilege. Their objective "was not to help labor--they generally neglected direct labor reforms--but to create better business conditions." He found the "workingmen's parties" almost totally indifferent to questions concerning "the hours, wages and conditions of labor." Dorfman charged that earlier historians had been "led astray" by their failure to appreciate the fact that within the Jacksonian context, the term "workingman" did not denote wage earners or members of a proletariat,

but was rather applied indiscriminately to anyone who engaged in any form of useful activity. "Only political opponents and the terrible aristocrats and the lazy idlers were clearly not honest working men."⁸

Dorfman concluded that the key to the Jacksonian era lay not in regarding the party battles of the day as expressions of antagonisms between social classes, but rather by seeing them as internecine feuds fought within the business community. "The so called labor movement . . . was anti-aristocratic rather than anti-capitalistic. . . . The humanitarian element contributed a weak impress of reform, but it was certainly thrown into the shade by the business drive." He charged that Schlesinger had sought to mould the Jackson movement into the pattern of later reform movements, and in so doing had done violence to the sources. He did not quarrel with Schlesinger's emphasis on the importance of urban elements within the Jacksonian coalition. He argued, however, that Schlesinger had mistaken both their nature and their objectives.

It will not do to read into the history of American radicalism, at least of the Jackson period, the later conception of a class conflict between the great capitalists on the one side, and a mass of propertyless wage earners on the other. The movement is a liberal one in the sense that it sought to eliminate or hedge law created privileges. And it was anti-capitalist only in the sense that it opposed the special advantages and sudden wealth that a few capitalists, or even down-at-the-heel adventurers and blue bloods, could secure by favoritism, the manipulation of political power, intrigue or ingratiating with the powers that be. After all, the Age of Jackson was an age of expansion, a great age of business enterprise. And the body

⁸Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization (New York, 1946), II, 637-695; "The Jackson Wage Earner Thesis," American Historical Review, LIV (January, 1940), 298-306. The "Wage Earner" article was originally read as a paper at the American Historical Association Convention in December of 1940.

of capitalists, enterprisers and ambitious workmen were not prepared to abandon the race to the type of political capitalists just described.⁹

Other studies supported Dorzhan's conclusions. Richard B. Morris, also of Columbia University, in an article in the American Historical Review entitled "Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker," pointed out that Jackson was the first President to call out federal troops to quell a labor disturbance. He concluded that "there is no evidence that Jackson favored combinations of labor any more than combinations of capital or that he approved of the strike weapon." Morris' revelation that Jackson's close political associate John W. Eaton held the presidency of the corporation involved in the dispute lent credence to the entrepreneurial interpretation of the Jacksonian movement.¹⁰

Further support for that interpretation was offered by William L. Sullivan, a graduate student of Morris at Columbia. Sullivan analyzed voting behavior in Philadelphia during the Jacksonian years. He found no evidence that the working class tended to vote for Jackson or for candidates of the Jacksonian party. Comparing property valuations and voting returns by wards, Sullivan concluded: "The workingmen of Philadelphia gave their votes far more consistently to the Whigs than to the Jacksonian Democrats. Moreover, it was prior to the Bank War and not during it that the working class revealed any inclination

⁹Dorzhan, American Historical Review, LIV, 306.

¹⁰Richard B. Morris, "Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker," American Historical Review, LV (October, 1949), 64-68. See also Richard B. Morris, "(13 Hickory Jackson was no FID)," Labor and Nation, V (May-June, 1949), 33-40.

to follow the lead of Jackson and his party."¹¹

Edward Pessen, also a student of Morris, undertook a similar analysis of voting behavior in Boston. He found that "Andrew Jackson himself was not supported at the polls by the workingman . . . it was not until the mid-thirties, at the end of his second term, that his party was able to win small majorities in any of the working class wards." Pessen also investigated the so-called "Workingman's Party" of Massachusetts. He found its membership motivated largely by "middle class aspirations." Pointing to the fact that many of the wealthiest men in the community, "Whigs in known political affiliation, received the party's endorsement, Pessen conjectured that the labor party may have been "a front organization for the Whigs." Pessen found little evidence of class consciousness as a force in Jacksonian politics.¹²

The revisionist interpretation of the Jacksonian labor movement found further expression in Walter Hugins' monograph study of the New York Locofocos. Taking issue with the interpretation of the Locofoco movement advanced by earlier scholars such as Trimble and the Schlesingers, Hugins argued that the movement was not grounded in anti-capitalist feeling or class antagonism. Rather, in Hugins' judgment,

¹¹William L. Sullivan, "Did Labor Support Andrew Jackson?" Political Science Quarterly, XLII (December, 1947), 569-589; The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840 (Harrisburg, 1955).

¹²Edward Pessen, "Did Labor Support Jackson?: The Boston Story," Political Science Quarterly, LXI (June, 1949), 262-274. Some of Pessen's other articles, however, have not offered as much support to the entrepreneurial interpretation. See Edward Pessen, "The Workingmen's Movement of the Jacksonian Era," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (December, 1956); "Thomas Skidmore, Agrarian Reformer In the Early American Labor Movement," New York History, XXV (July, 1954), 280-296; "The Ideology of Stephen Simpson, Upper Class Champion of the Early Philadelphia Workingmen's Movement," Pennsylvania History, XXII (October, 1955), 328-340.

it reflected the determination of newly enfranchised commoners of all classes--"journeyman and masters, manufacturers and merchants"--to obtain a share of the largess of capitalist society by destroying those last vestiges of special privilege which barred the way to economic advancement. It was Hugins' contention that the Workingmen's Movement in New York, far from representing a nascent proletarianism, drew support from a broad stratum of society ranging from wage earners to the professions. It sought not to challenge the emerging business system, but rather to assist "mechanics and small businessmen to further the democratization of this capitalist society, making more of its fruits available to all." Its adherents were moved, "not by proletarian animosity for the existing order, but by the desire for equal opportunity to become capitalists themselves."¹³

In arriving at these conclusions, Hugins employed a three fold approach. First, in analyzing the existing biographical data available for some seven hundred individuals active in the movement, he found that their spokesmen were drawn, not from the laboring class alone, but from all walks of life, representing a "microcosmic cross section of New York society." (He did, however, find evidence to indicate that there was little participation in the movement at the upper and lower extremes of the economic scale). Then, in analyzing their program, Hugins, following Dorfman, found that their demands were geared not to the needs of labor but to the aspirations of that portion of the business community injured by "aristocratic" restrictions on enterprise. Finally, in analyzing election returns, Hugins discovered that though the wards

¹³ Walter Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingman's Movement (Stanford, 1960), pp. 219-220.

of lower property valuation tended to supply a higher proportion of the Workingmen and Locofoco votes than did the more prosperous wards, their supporters were nonetheless distributed throughout the city. That, in his judgment, belied the assertion that "this was a class movement in any sense."¹⁴

Hugins not only rejected the proletarian interpretation of Locofocoism first advanced by Trimble, he also took issue with Bray Hammond's explanation of the movement as an urban expression of traditional agrarian patterns of thought. Its origins, he argued, were more complex and reflected the capitalistic aspirations of merchants and manufacturers stifled by the mercantile restrictions of the old order no less than the reaction of farm bred men to the complexities of urban, commercial life.¹⁵

The entrepreneurial thesis has not, however, won the complete acceptance of Jacksonian scholars. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., challenging Dorfman's interpretation, argued that the presence of business groups in the Jacksonian alliance in no way refuted the contention that the movement's primary purpose was the restraint of the capitalist class. "Of course," Schlesinger wrote, "many businessmen were pro-Jackson, as many businessmen were pro-Roosevelt; of course many supporters of the working classes in Jackson's day were not themselves workingmen, any more than they are today; of course the working classes were a much smaller part of the anti-business coalition than they were during the New Deal. But none of these facts, it seems to me, affects the main

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 8, 80, 112-128, 132-202, 208-220, 265.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 223.

thesis of the Age of Jackson that more can be understood about Jacksonian Democracy if it is regarded as a problem not of sections but of classes and that liberalism in America has been ordinarily the movement on the part of the other sections of society to restrain the power of the business community."¹⁶

Other scholars challenged the statistical methodology of the labor studies. Robert T. Bower of American University criticized Pessen's analysis of Boston politics on the grounds that Pessen had failed to fully appreciate the fact that, though in Whig Boston Jackson seldom carried any wards, his vote percentage in the poorer wards consistently exceeded his strength in the more prosperous parts of the city by an appreciable margin. That fact, in Bowers' judgment, revealed the clear influence of class considerations. Joseph G. Rayback of Pennsylvania State University, wrote of Sullivan's studies of the Pennsylvania labor vote: "His conclusion is questionable. It is based on the assumption that those Philadelphia wards in which per capita property assessments were lowest were those in which the workingmen lived, and upon the fact that the 'Jacksonian labor vote' in the major industrial declined after 1828. The assumption concerning property assessments is open to serious question: value of real estate is often very high in workingmen's wards by reason of the existence of industrial and commercial properties in them. The decline of the Jackson vote in the major industrial centers, moreover, may have been caused by population shifts--extensive in the 1830's--and by the drift of non-labor elements toward Whiggery. In addition the analysis ignores the fact

¹⁶Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Reply to Joseph Dorfman," American Historical Review, LIV (April, 1949), 785-786.

that Philadelphia County--which contained suburbs and liberties wherein large numbers of workingmen lived--remained staunchly Jacksonian throughout the period of decline." Although Dr. Rayback's criticism offered no positive suggestions concerning the correct methodological approach to the problem, it did serve to underline the limitations of the labor studies.¹⁷

To some historians, the findings of the entrepreneurial school with its emphasis on the middle class nature of the Jacksonian movement, were in pronounced contrast to the conclusions drawn from their own research. William G. Carleton of the University of Florida concluded from an extensive reading of the partisan literature of the era:

"Rarely in American history have the economic and social differences between the major parties been so clear cut as in the Van Buren period. . . . class and group politics cut across sectional lines in a way reminiscent of the Hamiltonian-Jeffersonian rivalry. The situation was developing in Jackson's time; it was an accomplished reality in Van Buren's day. Foreign commentators, domestic politicians and local newspaper editors of the period were conscious of these sharp party differences and of their economic and social bases. In a generation not yet familiar with the term economic determinism, the substantive ideas of that hypothesis were boldly proclaimed." Herbert Doherty's study of The Whigs of Florida found class cleavages between Whigs and Democrats in that state most pronounced. Charles Greer Seller's in his excellent biography, James K. Polk: Jacksonian found the Whig party in Tennessee

¹⁷Robert T. Bower, "Note on 'Did Labor support Jackson? The Boston Story,'" Political Science Quarterly, LXV (September, 1950), 441-444; Joseph G. Rayback, Review of The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840, by William A. Sullivan, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (September, 1956), 311-312.

sustained by the business community of Nashville, the wealthy planters of Middle Tennessee and the internal improvements advocates in the Eastern and Western extremes of the state, while "the small farmer . . . dominant in the Cumberland mountain region and the Tennessee River counties and numerous everywhere, constituted the backbone of the democracy."¹⁸

Other studies, however, offered less support to a class interpretation of the Jacksonian movement. Richard P. McCormick in an analysis of "Suffrage Classes and Party Alignments" published in the Mississippi Valley Historical Review argued that a study of Jacksonian election returns in North Carolina, which had a system of dual suffrage requiring property holding in elections to some offices but not others, offered little evidence of any relationship between economic status and voter behavior. In a subsequent article in the American Historical Review McCormick challenged the widely held thesis that Jackson's election to the presidency represented a mass upheaval of democracy. Mass participation in elections, McCormick pointed out, did not occur until after Jackson's retirement from political life. In Old Hickory's day, most voters generally stayed home on election day or evinced more interest in state and local politics than in national campaigns.¹⁹

Henry P. Stevens in his monograph The Early Jackson Party in

¹⁸William G. Carleton, "Political Aspects of the Van Buren Era," South Atlantic Quarterly, L (April, 1951), 167-183; Herbert J. Doherty, The Whigs of Florida (Gainesville, 1959); p. 73; Charles Greer Sellers, James W. Polk, Jacksonian (Princeton, 1957), p. 303.

¹⁹Richard P. McCormick, "Suffrage Classes and Party Alignments: A Study in Voter Behavior," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVI (December, 1949), 379-410; "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," American Historical Review, XLV (January, 1960), 288-301.

Ohio found "very little difference between one party and another." Stevens, who unfortunately limited his researches to the election of 1824 on the rather questionable grounds that the beginnings of modern two party divisions can be dated from that year, devoted several years to an exhaustive study of the background and social position of some 1200 known supporters of the three major candidates in that state. He found very little evidence of any division of terms of economic interests, ethnic origin or geographical location. The supporters of each candidate apparently comprised a cross section of the state as a whole. Finding the traditional explanations of voting behavior of little assistance, Stevens borrowed a page from the psychologists and suggested that only recourse to the irrational could explain Ohio political preferences in 1824. "Again and again," he declared, "it would seem from the nature of a man's career and from such other evidence as may throw light on his personality that men with a given outlook on life might be inclined to favor one presidential candidate rather than another. The more energetic and more overtly aggressive might prefer Jackson, the more judicious and reflective Adams, the more skilled in wire-pulling, Clay."²⁰

A more comprehensive study of state politics was provided in Charles McCool Snyder's The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1838-48. Snyder's study emphasized both the deep cleavages and disagreements on basic policy within the Jackson party and the powerful influence of entrepreneurial elements in the ranks. Snyder found class lines rather blurred in Pennsylvania. Edwin Arthur Miles' study of

²⁰Henry K. Stevens, The Early Jackson Party in Ohio (Durham, 1957), pp. v-vi, 148-149, 151, 160.

Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi found the personal popularity of Andrew Jackson of more importance than social or economic cleavages in explaining Mississippi politics during the Jacksonian years. "It would be fallacious to search for economic motives that might have prompted the Jacksonian Democrats to support particular measures endorsed by his administration; they championed the Old Hero more often in spite of his policies than because of them."²¹

As much of the historiographic debate of recent years has centered on the question of the nature and composition of the Jacksonian party, there were also some historians concerned with evaluating the worth of the Jacksonian program. Van Deusen's criticism of Jacksonian financial policies has already been noted. The sharpest castigation of the wisdom of Jacksonian policies has come from the students of economic history. Turning their attention to the role of Biddle's institution as a central banking agency, both Fritz Redlich, author of The Molding of American Banking published in 1951 and Walter D. Smith, whose Economic Aspects of the Second Bank of the United States appeared in 1960, charged the Jacksonians with responsibility for the chaotic state of American banking in the nineteenth century. Combining an acceptance of Whig arguments in defense of the bank as a stabilizer of the currency with modern central banking theory, they argued that the continuation of the Second Bank would have strengthened the entire economy and served the interests of all social classes. In their writings, Nicholas Biddle appeared, not as a powerful grasping monopolist whose schemes threatened

²¹Charles McCool Snyder, The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1823-1848 (Harrisburg, 1958), pp. 82-95; Edwin A. Miles, Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi (Chapel Hill, 1960), p. 160.

the republic, but rather as a creative economic statesman who sought his country's good.²²

Their conclusions were shared by Bray Hammond, a scholarly official of the Federal Reserve Board, whose Pulitzer prize winning history of Banks and Politics In America granted full credence to the Whig charges of Jacksonian demagoguery. Hammond regarded the Jacksonians, not as spokesmen for urban labor or the agrarian faction, but as unscrupulous commercial adventurers who sought to profit by the Bank's destruction. In support of his thesis Hammond carefully enumerated banking ventures and commercial speculations supported by leading members of the Kitchen Cabinet and state leaders of the Democratic party of Jackson's day.

With the business interests and objectives of the Jacksonians [Hammond wrote] I have no quarrel save for the cant which made the conflict over the Bank of the United States appear to be one of idealism against lucre and of human rights against property rights. The Jacksonians were no less drawn by lucre than so-called conservatives, but rather more. They had no great concern for human rights than the people who had what they were trying to get. The millionaires created by the so-called Jacksonian revolution of "agrarians" against "capitalists"--of the democracy against the money power--were richer than those they dispossessed, they were more numerous, they were quite as ruthless; and insofar as, after destroying the monopolies and vested rights the Jacksonians decried, produced far greater ones.

In Hammond's interpretation, the struggle of Biddle versus the Jacksonians was the struggle of an old cultured commercial aristocracy motivated by deep feelings of noblesse oblige against a new, vulgar grasping class of commercial adventurers concerned only with self-aggrandisement. If Schlesinger characterized the Whigs as ante-bellum

²²Fritz Redlich, The Holding of American Banking (New York, 1947); Walter F. Smith, Economic Aspects of the Second Bank of the United States (Cambridge, 1953).

malefactors of great wealth, Hammond portrayed the Jacksonians as hypocritical, cynical middle class demagogues. Their triumph historically led not to the idealism of the New Deal, but to the brutal depredations of the robber barons of the Gilded Age.²³

A similar view of the issues at stake in the Bank War was voiced in Thomas P. Govan's biography of Nicholas Biddle, published in 1959. Govan found Biddle motivated almost solely by considerations of the national welfare. Discussing his subject's propensity to use the bank's funds to enlist others to his cause, he wrote that "he was willing to bribe, not to increase his personal power or wealth" but to serve the public which "needed such an institution as the United States Bank." ("The morality of his actions," Govan added, "is a question not easy to solve.") He differed with Redlich, Smith and Hammond, who found Biddle a poor politician and a man of little tact, and attributed his downfall solely to the harshness of fate.

Govan accepted fully the Whig argument of a unity of class interests. "Jackson, Benton, Gouge and Woodbury and their associates," he argued, "could never understand that the various economic groups were mutually dependent on one another and the prosperity of one contingent on the others. They looked with suspicion upon merchants, manufacturers, bankers, financiers and assumed that the interests of these groups could be adversely influenced without destroying the market for

²³Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War (Princeton, 1957), pp. 345-346. See also Bray Hammond, "Jackson, Biddle and the Bank of the United States," Journal of Economic History, VII (May, 1947), 1-23; "Banking in the Early West: Monopoly, Prohibition and Laissez Faire," Journal of Economic History, VIII (May, 1949), 1-25; "Free Banking and Corporations: The New York Free Banking Act of 1833," Journal of Political Economy, XLIV (April, 1936), 189-209.

the produce of the farmers or creating unemployment for the workers." However, Govan did not fully endorse the findings of the entrepreneurial school; in his pages anti-capitalist prejudices shape the crusade against the Bank. He vied with Whig pamphleters, however, in the strength of his denunciations of Jacksonian ignorance and irresponsibility. Granting little credence to those who saw in the Jacksonian movement the origins of the New Deal, he argued that the policies New Deal reformers used "to overcome a depression were essentially identical with those that had been advocated and followed almost a century before by Biddle, a banker and a Hamiltonian nationalist." Govan joined with those who questioned the relevance of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian heritage to the twentieth century.²⁴

Though a majority of the scholars of the Jacksonian era in the past decade and a half have regarded both the class conflict interpretation and the agrarian frontier explanation of Jacksonian Democracy most inadequate, the revisionists have by no means been agreed in their essential conception of the meaning of the Jacksonian movement. To some writers, such as Richard Hofstadter, the movement has appeared to be primarily a force dedicated to the democratization and liberalization of American capitalism. Others, such as Marvin Meyers and Glyndon Van Deusen, though recognizing the presence of entrepreneurial elements within the Jacksonian coalition, have stressed the "reactionary" nature of the Jacksonian appeal and program. In their pages, the Jacksonians have been portrayed, not as the confident apostles of a democratic free enterprise society, but as timorous men who, fearful of

²⁴Thomas F. Govan, Nicholas Biddle, Nationalist and Public Banker (Chicago, 1939), pp. vii, 390, 394.

sional change, looked to the past rather than the future.

The revisionists however, have agreed in large measure in their essential sympathy for the "big program and position. In recent historical accounts, the Whigs have often appeared, not as cynical male-factors of great wealth, but as forward looking prophets of capitalist progress. The rehabilitation of Nicholas Vreede, now widely heralded as a "creative economic leader" motivated not by selfish gain but by idealistic concern for the national well-being, dramatically illustrates this new viewpoint. Indeed, the Whig social unity appeal itself, now dressed in sophisticated scholarly garb, has been granted a new appreciation in the writings of scholars such as Thomas P. Geyan. One might conjecture that this change in emphasis is a reflection of the increasing political conservatism of mid-century America. Historians writing in a time of great prosperity, living in the midst of a business-oriented society, have found little appeal in the strong Jacksonian invectives against "monopolists," "monied Monsters" and "chartered corporations." Indeed, they have tended to question the appeal of such rhetorical bombast in Jackson's own day.

The liberal historian, on the other hand, committed to positive government and to the principle of governmental regulation of the economy, has also found many aspects of the Jacksonian program unattractive. The Jacksonian belief in laissez faire, in strict construction of the Constitution, and in states rights bears little resemblance to the creed of modern liberalism. Any temptation to Jacksonian partisanship has therefore been understandably lessened.

It would appear, therefore, that much of the current revisionism has reflected the shifting frame of reference of the present. This

point should not, however, be unduly labored. Much of the current revisionism within Jacksonian historiography has also reflected the uncovering of new evidence, the use of new methodologies and the application of new theories to the understanding of the Jacksonian era. The evidence provided by those who sought to analyze the social composition of the Jacksonian electorate, while hardly conclusive, has provided objective grounds for the reconsideration of the class interpretation of Jacksonian politics. Detailed studies of Jacksonian politics on the state level, seldom undertaken in earlier decades, in recent years have provided much information at variance with the common generalizations concerning the Jacksonian movement. The renewed appreciation of the role of the Bank of the United States as a stabilizing influence in the economy, granted a more systematic formulation in central banking theory than was available to Whig partisans, served to discredit the wisdom of Jacksonian banking policies. The use of new social science methodologies led several scholars to probe the hidden motivations beneath the facade of political invective, granting to Jacksonian scholarship an unaccustomed sophistication. Though it would be hard to deny that current political and philosophical concerns have been reflected in recent Jacksonian historiography, it would be a rather naive over-generalization to dismiss all current revisionism as sheer presentism.

EPILIQUE

A century has now elapsed since the publication of James Parton's pioneering Life of Andrew Jackson, but that scholar's lament on the lack of consensus among writers dealing with Jackson and his age has lost little of its original validity.

Andrew Jackson, I am given to understand, was a patriot and a traitor. He was one of the greatest of generals, and wholly ignorant of the art of war. A writer brilliant, elegant, eloquent, without being able to compose a correct sentence or spell words of four syllables. The first of statesmen, he never devised, he never framed a measure. He was the most candid of men, and was capable of profound dissimulation. A most law abiding, law defying citizen. A stickler for discipline, he never hesitated to disobey a superior. A democratic aristocrat. An urbane savage. An atrocious saint.¹

The profound disagreement Parton found in published evaluations of Jackson's life and character now extends to every aspect of the Jacksonian era. Historians since Parton's day have damned Jacksonian Democracy as a perversion of republican government and have praised it as the fulfillment of the American promise. They have regarded Jackson as the most autocratic of despots and as the most democratic of Presidents. They have explained the Jacksonian movement as the radical culmination of the egalitarian upheaval, and have also dismissed it as a blindly conservative resistance to economic progress. They have told their readers that the movement's roots lie in the agrarian, Western frontier and they have explained its strength in terms of urban unrest.

¹James Parton, Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1860), I, p. v.

They have found its sustaining force in the conflict of classes, and they have denied the presence of class struggle or class awareness during the Jacksonian years. They have viewed the movement as an uprising of farmer and laborer against the political and economic oligarchy of the business community, and they have explained the movement as an exclusively middle class, business oriented quest for quick wealth. Andrew Jackson has been portrayed as the friend of the down-trodden and as a strike-breaker. The debate over the meaning of Jacksonian Democracy continues and, if anything, grows more heated with the passage of years. History has sustained neither the partisans of old Hickory nor those of Henry Clay, for historians cannot agree on a verdict. A reading of Jacksonian historiography tends to disabuse one of a belief in the very existence of "the judgment of history."

Indeed, the judgments of historians have frequently echoed the pronouncements of Jacksonian or Whig partisans. Most of the major historical interpretations of the meaning and significance of Jacksonian political struggles were first enunciated, in highly incomplete and greatly exaggerated form, by the historical actors themselves and may be found in the sources of the period. Historians, in framing their evaluations of the Jacksonian movement, have accepted or rejected the themes suggested in the partisan sources. They have chosen to regard certain of these themes as of major importance, and they have decided to minimize or ignore others. Certain interpretative themes have appealed to the historians of one generation, only to leave those of another uninterested and unimpressed. Much, though not all, of the historiography of Jacksonian Democracy may be regarded as a series of

variations on certain interpretative themes embodied within the sources of the Jacksonian period.

Perhaps the most decisive factor determining the historian's acceptance or rejection of these interpretative themes has been his own contemporary frame of reference. Thus, to the genteel, patrician historians of the Gilded Age, obsessed by the problems of corruption in government, the vulgarity of politics, and the need for Civil Service reform, the introduction of the Spoils System appeared to be the great event of the Jacksonian years. Joining with the Whigs in regarding Andrew Jackson as the degrader of the Republic and his movement as a vulgarizing force in American life, these writers generally quoted with almost unqualified approval the fulmination of Henry Clay and other Whig partisans against "Jacksonian despotism." Basically conservative in their social attitudes, Gilded Age historians were likewise attracted to the Whig doctrines of the unity of social classes and were prone to join in Whig denunciations of the Jacksonian demagoguery of setting class against class. Yet, as staunch advocates of laissez faire and as apostles of Social Darwinism, these writers were by no means prepared to endorse the Whig stand on the economic issues of the day. Generally, they granted their approbation to the Jacksonian position on the Bank, the tariff and internal improvements. Even so, their evaluation of the Jacksonian role in American life remained a negative one. In their historical accounts of the Jackson era, the spoils system was made the over-weening issue of the period. A nostalgia for the early republic of Jefferson and Adams, for the rule of gentlemen and scholars, permeated their writings. In their analyses, the Jacksonian era signalized the beginning of the degradation of the

American Republic.

Historians of the following generation, often caught up in the Progressive crusade to revitalize Democracy, saw the party battles of the Jackson era in quite a different light. If their predecessors had granted their approval to Whig polemics against spoils system politics and Jacksonian despotism, writers of the early twentieth century were attracted to the Jacksonian interpretation of their role as defenders of the principle of popular rule. They tended to accept the Jacksonian defense of the spoils system as essential to the realization of truly democratic government. Historians of the generation of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were generally advocates of a strong executive leadership. Consequently they praised Jackson's firm use of executive prerogatives, accepting the Jacksonian argument that the President represented the will of the whole people. Possessing a belief in the political process as a means whereby the nation might be reformed and uplifted, a belief not shared by many of their Gilded Age counterparts, early twentieth century historians often included in their narratives praise for Jackson and Van Buren as the architects of the modern political party. Attracted to the egalitarian society of the frontier, these scholars, influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner, granted much credence to the Jacksonian claims to represent the agrarian ideals of the Jeffersonian Republic. They placed relatively less emphasis on class antagonisms in the Jacksonian period, perhaps because they feared the class animosities of their own day. Like their Gilded Age predecessors, their writings contained strong undertones of nostalgia for the past. They looked, however, not to the aristocratic republic of the House of Adams for inspiration, but to the vigorous democratic society

of the Jacksonian frontier. In the frontier they perceived the embodiment of their social ideal: an America characterized by opportunity for all, possessed of truly democratic government and largely free of class antagonisms. Though not agreed in their judgments on Jacksonian economic policies, these historians generally regarded the Jacksonian movement as a creative force in American political life.

If historians of the Progressive generation placed their primary emphasis on political democracy as the great Jacksonian contribution, scholars writing in the 1920's, 1930's and early 1940's came to place increasing emphasis on the economic aspects of the movement. Centering their attention on the role of urban labor in the Jacksonian party, these historians gave credence to those urban Jacksonians such as William Leggett and Orestes Brownson who had argued for the necessity of economic as well as political reform. Drawing heavily on those Jacksonian writers who had portrayed the crusade against the Bank as a battle against economic injustice and oppression, these historians came to regard the Jacksonian movement as an episode in the struggle to assure the primacy of human rights over property rights. Rejecting the Whig arguments of the unity of class interests, they saw in the Jacksonian crusade an heroic effort to restrain the greed and rapacity of the capitalist class. Jacksonian invective against bankers and monopolists appeared in their narratives not as wicked demagoguery but as rational warnings that the common people must protect their own interests. Writing in an age characterized by increasing urbanization, labor strife and economic fluctuation, they found in Jacksonian economic protest the movement's most meaningful contribution.

In the past decade and a half, however, their findings have

been challenged by historians who have argued that consensus on middle class values, not class conflict, has constituted the grand theme of American political thought. Some contemporary writers regarding the Jacksonian Bank crusade as empty demagoguery, designed to advance the interests of rival entrepreneurial groups, have concluded that no significant differences in basic objectives separated the parties of Jackson's era. In advancing their case, they have granted credence to the Whig arguments that self-interest and opportunism, not disinterested idealism, lay at the root of Jackson's attack on the prerogatives of Biddle's institution. Some have expanded on the Whig arguments in defense of the role played by the Bank of the United States in stabilizing the nation's currency by drawing on modern central banking theory. In their interpretation, the Jacksonian economic program was a destructive one. Recent views of the Jacksonian movement have reflected both a current conservative aversion to class conflict as a theme of American history and a current liberal acceptance of government as a creative force in the nation's economy.

Though historians from Parton to the present have drawn on partisan interpretations in their evaluations of the Jacksonian movement, the Jacksonian historiography of the past few decades has evinced a higher degree of sophistication in its handling of the source materials than was apparent in nineteenth century treatments of the Jacksonian era. Parton, von Holst, Schouler and their contemporaries were largely concerned with praising or blaming the friends and foes of Old Hickory and often quoted uncritically from those historical actors who won their approval. There has been a more pronounced tendency throughout the twentieth century to devote primary attention to the analysis and

explanation of the Jacksonian movement, rather than to passing judgment upon it. Scholarly endeavors to answer such questions as, What groups gave their support to Jackson? and What factors explain the appeal of Jacksonian rhetoric?, have given to Jacksonian scholarship an increasing measure of objectivity. Even so, it would be difficult to maintain that recent writers are totally free from partisan predilections. Though their relatively sober tone compares favorably with the blatant partisanship of many of their nineteenth century counterparts, they are by no means without a point of view. Their increasing sobriety no doubt reflects an increasing degree of professional competence. But it may also reflect the increasing irrelevance of the Jacksonian position to the partisan issues of our own day. On matters which remain controversial within our own political context--the Whig doctrine of the unity of the interests of social classes, for example--it can be argued that the historian's point of view will inevitably color his attitude toward Whig and Jacksonian spokesmen and the partisan interpretations they enunciated.

Though many of the interpretations advanced by historians in their treatment of the Jacksonian movement throughout the years have been drawn largely from partisan sources and presented to the readers in sophisticated and refined garb, others have reflected concepts unknown or but vaguely understood to Jacksonian partisans. Thus historians of the Gilded Age justified Jacksonian economic policies by recourse to a Social Darwinist philosophy never invoked nor even anticipated by Jacksonian spokesmen. The early twentieth century defense of the spoils system and of Jackson's vigorous presidential leadership represented an amalgamation of partisan Jacksonian arguments

with modern theories of political organization and of the role of political parties in American society rather alien to the Jacksonian era. The recent defense of Nicholas Biddle and the Second Bank of the United States has been grounded in an appreciation of the role of central banking agencies which, in Biddle's day, was understood only in the vaguest sense.

Some interpretations advanced by partisans, lacking relevance to the historian's own age, have been largely ignored. The Jacksonian interpretation of their mission as defenders of constitutional purity and states rights against the machinations of anti-Republican aristocracy bent on centralization of power has seldom been seriously advanced by historians sympathetic to the Jacksonian cause. The Whig conception of the virtues of strict limitation of presidential power and their portrayal of their cause as the protection of the nation from executive despotism, though granted some credence by Gilded Age historians, in recent years has generally been dismissed as mere demagoguery by both scholarly friends and scholarly foes of the Whig position. The theory that majority rule degrades society, posed by a few ultra-conservative Whigs, has seldom been granted a serious, philosophical discussion in the pages of American writers of history. It would appear that those partisan issues that have lacked relevance to the historian's own age have been granted little attention. Likewise, issues that are of significance to the historian's generation are usually given inordinate attention. Thus, the Gilded Age was fascinated by the horrors of the spoils system, the Progressive period by the creation of the modern party system, the Depression Decade by the Jacksonian demand for economic justice and the present generation by the

entrepreneurial influence in the Jackson movement and the economic importance of a central banking system.

This raises the question whether the so-called "insights of historical perspective" may not, after all, be nothing more than a reflection of unconscious warping of the past to fit the preoccupations of the present. Many a dead partisan of half forgotten political wars would be astonished and confounded by the judgment of history. As the issues which excited the emotions of a past generation lose their relevancy and as once minor concerns come to possess a gripping import, the meaning of the past undergoes its gradual but never ending transformation. Thus historians come to plead the cause of long dead partisans and base their case often on arguments the latter might well have dismissed out of hand as incomplete, minor or downright incomprehensible. The bafflement of a Clay or Webster, a Benton or a Calhoun following the vicissitudes of recent Jacksonian historiography may easily be imagined. It is doubtful whether any final historical judgment is ever rendered.

Though the historian must strive to transcend the frame of reference of his own generation if he is to recapture the mind and spirit of a past era, his task is one of such great difficulty that it may be conjectured that knowledge of the past undistorted by the frame of reference of the present is virtually unattainable. If this is so, if the past can never be recaptured with perfect fidelity, of what use then is history? It may be suggested that, even though the historian may inevitably fall short of the achievement of his greatest objective, his researches may nonetheless be of no little service in liberating the present from its bondage to the past. Perhaps, as Charles A. Beard

has suggested, the historical scholar's greatest service may be to demonstrate to his own generation that certain beliefs and dogmas, forms and usages held sacrosanct in his time in actuality arose to meet the specific needs of a dead past and are of little relevance in fitting the demands of the present or of the future. By tracing the origins of customs, ideas and institutions, he can thereby strip away the illusions which surround his society's traditions, thereby demanding that each tradition conform to the compelling needs of the here and now. In a word, it may be his office to assist his generation in facing contemporary realities. History can be a liberating agent, freeing the present from the grip of the dead hand of the past.²

²Charles A. Beard, "Grounds for a Reconsideration of Historiography," Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography, Social Science Research Council Bulletin 54 (New York, 1943), pp. 1-14.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

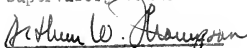
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